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## Inclusion Strategies Effect on the Promotion Aspirations of African American Women

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Terry Curtis Daniels

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Review Committee

Dr. Frederica Hendricks-Noble, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Eric Hickey, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. James Brown, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2018

Abstract

Inclusion Strategies Effect on the Promotion Aspirations of African American Women

by

Terry Curtis Daniels

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Western Kentucky University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Walden University

August 2018

## Abstract

The number of African American women filling manufacturing leadership positions has continued to be severely disproportionate to the number of African American women in manufacturing. This disproportion is problematic because it undermines the intention and effort to build inclusive workplace cultures. This disproportion also negates the industry's advances in organizational diversity and inclusion initiatives. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of 10 African American women who entered manufacturing with aspirations for career growth. The theoretical framework for the study included Tajfel's social identity theory. The participant perceptions were examined to understand the effect of organizational inclusion strategies on promotion aspirations. The study involved analyzing participant transcripts and then coding for emerged themes. Key findings revealed that inclusion strategies influence promotion and promotion aspirations. It was also concluded that these women benefited professionally when their organizations implemented and committed to inclusion strategies such as mentoring, social inclusion events, and leadership development. The study also found that as the careers progressed for many of the women, their ability to impact positive social change increased through role modeling these learned disciplines. The implications for positive social change from this research include recommendations for organizations and human resource departments. The recommendations include evidenced-based strategies which capitalize on the benefits of leadership mentor initiatives for women, particularly African American women.

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## Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Donald L. Daniels, Sr. and mother, Lucy G. Daniels. I dedicate this study to them because they instilled in me a passion for perseverance. I dedicate this to my wife, Rita, and three sons, Tyler, Taylour, and Tanner, as they encouraged my perseverance by their pride in my pursuit for this academic goal. I love you all and thank you for believing in me.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

The 2014 United States Department of Labor statistics revealed that Asian and White women, 49% and 43% respectively, were more likely to work in high-paying management, professional, and related occupations than were employed Black and Hispanic women, 35% and 26% respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Buse (2017) reported that women make up 47% of the United States workforce and 52% of all professionals and managers; however, only 29% of the manufacturing workforce and 5% of manufacturing chief executive officers are women. Fry (2014) noted that a 2013 report revealed women were 50% of the United States workforce and made up only 20% of the manufacturing workforce. The data Buse and Fry found revealed an improving percentage of women in the workforce and in manufacturing.

Although the reasons are not clear, Meyers and Vallas (2016) noted that diversity programs had done little to enhance the opportunities for African American women. Meyers and Vallas noted that more research is needed to understand the “workplace’s inability to overcome the limits traditionally imposed on white women and men and women of color” (p. 123). Embracing a broadly multicultural conception of worker identity and a diversity strategy that actively encourages learning across demographic lines contributes to the cultural strengths and supports overcoming these limitations (Meyers & Vallas, 2016). Eagly and Chin (2010) noted that despite the growing diversity among leaders, the underrepresentation of women and racial and ethnic minorities in leadership roles needs an explanation. Eagly and Chin found that with the

interconnectivity of world cultures and immigration-driven increases in cultural and ethnic diversity within many nations, the representation in leadership observation was equally visible.

Through an examination of social science research, Key et al. (2012) found the existence of a significant body of research that revealed treatment of women of color is significantly different than of their peers. Meurs, Breaux, and Perrewé (2008) discovered that even though women comprise close to 50% of managerial and professional positions, they also tend to hold lower paid positions within these professions. Meurs et al. further noted that demographic profiles of workers in the United States have been changing and forcing other workplace changes, such as the need for "increased flexibility of work scheduling, the rise of issues related to tolerance and inclusion, and HR programs specifically designed to address work–family issues (p. 1460)." The changing workplace dynamics support strategies to provide unrepresented and underrepresented employees a pathway to workplace assimilation (Ryan & Wessel, 2015). Organizational diversity and inclusion strategies are often characterized by new initiatives to enhance and promote efforts that support unrepresented and underrepresented minorities and reflect an attempt to model progressive and changing societal demographic workplaces (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015). An underlying question from the human resource management perspective would ascertain potential appropriate initiatives to support female employment in general positions as well as help them in male-dominant roles (Farndale, Biron, Briscoe, & Raghuram, 2015). Farndale et al. (2015) further noted that the establishment of a talent management strategy keeps the organization cognizant of biases

that prevent women from being identified as talented to have equal opportunity for advancement. Further research, as detailed in Chapter 2, revealed that many studies had examined organizational diversity and inclusion behavior and findings that have contributed to the perceptions and promotion of employees not considered to be part of the dominant culture.

As society demographics continue to shift and change, it is highly likely that workplace culture will reflect these changing demographics. The status quo of the individuals who receive promotions can be challenged by organizational diversity and inclusion initiatives and implemented demographic changes. Joshi, Liao, and Roh (2011) defined workplace demography as "relational effects of individual demographic dissimilarity about the group on different outcomes as well as the compositional effects of work group-level or firm-level demographic diversity on the team and firm outcomes" (p. 522). Jones and Palmer (2011) found that the glass ceiling women face to get into leadership positions in the community college setting is a continuing challenge. One goal of diversity and inclusion strategy supports women breaking through the proverbial glass ceilings.

This dissertation used the social identity framework to understand what needs were not being met for African American women in organizational inclusion strategies that contributed to their low percentage in manufacturing leadership positions and their aspirations for promotion. Davies, Spencer, and Steele (2005) noted that given that gender is likely to be a social identity that is critical to the effectiveness of women in leadership positions, more research is needed as they navigate these situational cues.



Avery et al. (2013) noted that additional research in settings with lower societal and cultural expectations for social affirmations is needed to examine the role of workplace relationships on diversity in leadership. Carlone and Johnson (2007) noted that questions remain and need to be further examined of how women of color persist in the face of unpleasant cultural conditions. Gotsis and Grimani (2016) suggested that inclusive workplace strategies alleviate the needs of vulnerable groups. Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) noted that gender bias in organizations and society serve as a disruption to the learning ability of women for leadership positions. Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson (2013) found that barriers exist as women pursue leadership positions. Key et al., (2012) found that in places they have worked, women of color perceive more obstacles to and receive less assistance with their advancement in their organizations. Through implemented inclusion strategies, organizations can proactively help African American women perceive that their paths to promotions are important and can be evidence the strategies are intended to produce tangible results.

### **Background**

The unique nature of manufacturing often requires more physical and manual labor. Historically, manufacturing has been highly dominated by men in both manual labor and leadership. In recent year, laws have challenged organizations to employ more women and therefore enhance workplace diversity (Ali, Kulik, & Metz, 2011). Ali et al. (2011) found that no unique situations in the manufacturing workplace prevented it from benefitting from gender equity than the service industry. Beyond existing challenges that social identity group members must cope with in the face of adversity, researchers need

to understand the formation of dual identities of these individuals both as leaders and minority group members, as well as their added-value in leadership functioning (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016, p. 241). Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009) noted that ascension to higher leadership positions for women of color is often met with unrelenting challenges, unlike many other demographic groups.

Kubu (2018) noted that despite all the advances made with laws and organizational initiatives, current industries are far from equity with women in leadership positions. David (2010) noted that stereotyping about women in leadership positions was still prevalent in organizations and the perception remained that women lack commitment and purpose to make to the top. DeFrank-Cole and Tan (2017) stated that "the phrase 'times are a changin'" was one that brought hope for a young African American woman who realized the importance of education and hard work" (pp. 44). DeFrank-Cole and Tan further noted that as women of color began to enter the workforce in the mid-1970s, challenges to break the proverbial glass ceiling were even more difficult to conquer. This phenomenological study sought to understand the role organizational inclusion strategies played in closing this gap for African American women in manufacturing leadership.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The new millennium has brought about a pressing concern for diversity issues (Bagga-Gupta, 2007). Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec (2015) noted that in academia and even more in public policy and corporate practice, increasing attention had been given to various forms of diversity. Researchers have noted that the combined rise in organizational inclusion diversity programs and the discourse in a society of the

exclusion of "others" suggested a higher interest in these programs but also a growth in the skepticism of these efforts (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013).

The effort of organizations to create a work environment where all employees feel included has been a goal of many researchers in this topic area (Downey, van der Werff, Thomas, & Plaut 2015). Typically, inclusion literature has been from the perspective where employees feel included, but one challenge of achieving this inclusiveness may lie within the organization's ability to leverage the inclusion strategy to build diversity into the workplace leadership (Downey et al., 2015). An additional challenge could come forth if the organization's leadership fails to understand the importance of employee inclusiveness to workplace satisfaction and well-being (Sabharwal, 2014). Furthermore, Jansen et al. (2015) suggested that inclusion refers to individuals perceiving they are accepted members of an organization and can be their authentic selves. Jansen et al. also noted that when individuals feel they are part of the majority and included, there is more commitment to the organization's efforts for growth.

LeBeauf, Maples, D'Andrea, Watson, and Packman (2007) found that while there are many champions for workforce diversity, questions may remain as to what diversity management means or how to approach diversity management. Diversity management is defined as managing human resource policy to ensure policy variation is not characteristically based, does not cause any variation or inhibit performance, or cause variation in leverages to enhance performance (Olsen & Martins, 2016). Even if organizations can maximize the feelings of inclusiveness by diverse employees, the challenge remains to develop champions for this organizational effort. The promotion of

diverse employees or women is one way organizations may develop internal champions for the diversity strategy (LeBeauf et al., 2007). Nishii (2013) found that even with the growing awareness of benefits of inclusion, the scarce empirical testament of the power of inclusion remains evident in research.

### **Purpose Statement**

Key et al. (2012) found that the methods African American women use to overcome their childhood and adulthood disadvantages to succeed are not clearly known or measured. Key et al. further noted that these methods may be individual or environmental characteristics and not issues such as personal control, assertiveness, or personal drive to overcome the mentality of a victim and should require additional research. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women and organizational inclusion strategies that affected their aspiration for promotion. Gilbert, Carr-Ruffino, Ivancevich, and Lownes-Jackson (2003) noted that minorities are stereotyped to lack the traits that fit higher leadership positions but do fit lower level positions in organizations. Walsh (2012) noted that women typically had lower perceptions for career advancement. Per Key et al., African American women experience less encouragement to succeed and advance their careers. Specifically, my intention with this study was to understand what African American women perceived as factors that limited them from being better prepared to receive stronger consideration for manufacturing leadership positions. This research presented the African American women's perspective on the organizational inclusions strategies' effect on their aspirations for promotions and their sense of inclusion in the workplace.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was phenomenological. A qualitative approach allowed deeper inquiry to learn from the African American women's perspective, the influence organizational diversity and inclusion strategies had on their aspiration for promotion and progression into manufacturing supervision and operational leadership positions. Creswell (2013), in using the concepts taken from Moustakas (1994) and Van Manen (1990), suggested that phenomenological studies are the lived experiences of individuals and their subjective experiences of the phenomenon and real experiences of something in common with other people. The exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women aspirations for promotion into leadership positions was the focus of this dissertation. Interview questions regarding the influence of inclusion strategies explored participant aspirations for promotions into leadership.

### **Primary Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to understand the perceptions of African American women on the effect organizational inclusion strategies had on their aspirations for promotion into leadership positions.

RQ1 - What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions' perception of organizational inclusion strategies?

RQ2 - What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ3 - What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ4 - What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion?

RQ5 - What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis for the study was Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory. According to Hannum (2007), a person's identity is intertwined with the belongingness to the group and is inclusive within the social identity theory. Haslam and Ellemers (2011) noted that social identity theory enables individuals from low-status groups to learn and understand strategies to improve their social identity. The lens of social identity theory provided a view of the individual's perception of his or her personal identity and inclusive or exclusive perceptions in the workplace. The theory also provided a vantage point for African American women to view their identity and fit within the workplace culture. I sought to further the understanding of organizational inclusion strategy and the impact on promotion aspirations of African American women.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Acculturation* is the process by which individuals from a nondominant culture adapt to a new culture (Thompson, Lightfoot, Castillo, & Hurst, 2010).

*Diversity* is the differences and disparities in people to include but not limited to racial and ethnic differences. Other differences include gender, sexual orientation, and any personal identity characteristic that is unique to the individual or group of individuals (Ferdman, 2017).

*Engagement* is the harnessing of an employee's full self-regarding physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work role performances (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010).

*Inclusion* focuses on employee involvement and the integration of diversity into organizational systems and processes (Roberson, 2006). The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM, 2016) added that *inclusion* is a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging.

*Inclusion strategy* is the selection of all well-qualified candidates from a broader pool of applicants (Hugenberg, Bodenhausen, & McLain, 2006).

*Inclusive diversity* is a set of behaviors that promote collaboration amongst a diverse group (OPM, 2016).

*Leadership* is an establishment of processes to achieve organizational goals and behavior in the workplace and then manage systems that affect employee outcomes (McCann & Holt, 2013).

*Promotion aspiration* is when individual behavior is motivated, energized, and encouraged to establish midrange goals (Mouratidis, Lens, Vansteenkiste, Michou, & Soenens, 2013).

*Social identity* refers to the aspect of a person's self-image derived from membership with social groups (Obschonka, Goethner, Silbereisen, & Cantner, 2012).

*Workforce diversity* is a collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively (OPM, 2016).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study's participants included African American women who occupied leadership positions such as plant manager, operations manager, plant superintendent, foreman, and production supervisor in a manufacturing setting. Therefore, the study focused on the lived perceptions of the participants and factors that contributed to their promotion and aspirations for promotions. The study excluded other employees who were not African American, female, or leaders in nonmanufacturing settings. To achieve a qualifiable sample size of 10 to 15 participants, African American women in manufacturing leadership positions were asked to recommend other African American women in manufacturing leadership positions who might be willing to participate in this research. Prendergast and Maggie (2013) noted that large numbers of subjects do not imply greater generalizability, and even three to six individuals can be adequate for a phenomenological study. The study excluded other data collections instruments such as surveys or other retrievable personnel documents.



### **Limitations**

Due to the low demographic population of the participant pool, finding African American women with general manager, operation manager, production manager, supervisor, or like management of people titles in a manufacturing setting proved to be challenging. A second limitation was that the sample was homogeneous, which would not provide multiple perspectives or women in similar positions and who considered themselves diverse. The results of the study may be important to the persons within the research and those with similar circumstances. A third limitation was a potential skewing of data due to the participants' abilities to accurately recall experiences and events that may have occurred several years prior. A final limitation is that the scope was limited to manufacturing facilities in one geographic location.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to heighten awareness and understanding of the factors in organizational diversity and inclusion strategies that influenced the aspirations for the promotion of African American women in manufacturing supervision. In this age of changing demographics in the United States with little impact on the percentage of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions or aspirations for these positions, the research filled a gap in the literature. Little was known of African American women's experiences and perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies and their effect on promotions aspirations of this demographic population. This study adds to existing diversity and inclusion literature and sheds light on the African American women demographic group in leadership.

The focus on promotion aspirations of African American women in a manufacturing setting and how they were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies supported the closing of a gap for diversity management research. My hoped was that this research revealed how effective organizational inclusion strategies provided a passageway for African American women to feel a part of the workplace community and aspired to seek manufacturing supervision positions. Moreover, and most importantly, the research may help these women identify factors they can control that affect their promotion opportunities for manufacturing supervision. With this awareness and understanding, organizations can target actions that can enhance the aspiration and potential for more African American women to achieve open manufacturing supervision positions.

Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, and Kriska (2000) found "the more negative perceptions of minorities and women in many areas suggest why some organizations may have difficulties in becoming more diverse" (pp. 175). Wyatt-Nichol and Antwi-Boasiako (2012) noted that recognizing the importance of diversity, many organizations have developed policies and professional development initiatives to attract, retain, and develop employees, as well as facilitate communication and understanding among employees. Pinnington and Sandberg (2013) found that the lack of open conversation about promotion difficulties by women was a constraint in the promotion of women. As these avenues of conversations open and achievements happen for African American women, this change increases awareness of the organization and influences social change.

Bang and Vossoughi (2016) noted that social change advances fundamental knowledge and learning. The research interviews explored the lived experiences of African American women in the workplace and the impact inclusion strategies had on their aspirations for promotions. Additionally, the interviews explored factors that contributed to their success and obstacles that impeded their progress and aspirations for promotions. The data collected were used to identify organizational activities that positively and negatively affected the promotion aspirations of African American women for leadership positions in the manufacturing setting. The information supports efforts of organizations and government entities to increase the number of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions. The findings contributed to positive social change because they provided increased awareness for organizational leadership regarding what actions and inaction disenfranchised and caused underutilization of an often untapped and unnoticed groups in the workplace.

### **Summary**

A considerable amount of research has been conducted over many years to understand better how to build and maintain inclusiveness for individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures (Patel, Tabb, & Sue, 2017). The trends in diversity research and how it has given perspective to both society and social sciences have also opened and provided knowledge for the workplace (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). Understanding these trends and how they affect demographic groups, African American women, and their promotion aspirations into manufacturing leadership was a critical focus of this research.

Castillo and Hurst (2010) noted that as White Americans are the dominant culture, to be considered socially accepted, African Americans must assimilate into the culture that is like immigrant processes. Olsen and Martin (2012) found that nondominant subgroup conformance to the dominant group is the process of assimilation. Per Pilar and Udasco (2004), members of nondominant groups fail to gain access to the dominant culture because of prejudiced behavior from members of the dominant culture. The lack of access places limitation on the opportunities for nondominant groups (Pilar and Udasco, 2004). Stanley (2009) noted a lack of research on the experiences of African American women's opportunity and leadership experiences. Chapter 2 provides a more thorough exploration and discussion of relevant literature. Chapter 2 further includes evidence of the abundance of research on organizational strategy, diversity and inclusion, hiring and promotion of leaders, minority and female leadership in other settings, and the limited research regarding African American women leader aspiration for progression and promotion in manufacturing supervisor and other operational leadership positions. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design, rationale, and the methodology. Chapter 4 provides the results of the research questions regarding the lived experiences of these participants and identifies themes that provide evidence of the impact inclusion strategies have on promotion aspirations. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the research findings, explores topics for future study, and discusses the potential social change implications of the research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The focus of this literature review was to provide an analysis of previous scholarly research on diversity and inclusion strategies' effect on promotion aspirations of African American women. In the review, I have explored factors that influence inclusion strategy development, its goals within the workplace, and how employee promotions into leadership are affected by this strategy. Even though inclusion has gained increased attention in recent years, scholars have continued to view it as a new concept with more work to be done to develop as a construct (Shore et al., 2011). McKay, Avery, and Morris (2008) noted that diversity management has become paramount due to the entrance of many previously underrepresented groups into the workplace. This review first includes description of social identity theory, the theoretical framework used to underpin this study. Next is a review of the literature on organizational strategy, workplace diversity, and inclusion strategies, which explores research regarding the impact of inclusion strategy and the perceptions of employees and most especially the perceptions of African American women as it relates to their aspiration for promotion because of the inclusion strategy. Finally, the review includes exploration of the impact of inclusion strategies on employee engagement, perceptions of inclusion, the effect of inclusion strategies on workplace aspirations and promotions, and African American women promotions to leadership in manufacturing workplaces.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Search strategies in support of the literature review included comprehensive searches using Walden University research databases. The search also included all EBSCOhost databases and ProQuest. Key search terms included *African American women leadership, diversity leadership, inclusion, diversity and inclusion, organizational strategy, promotion, workplace promotions, hiring, aspiration, leadership development, leadership, social identity, mentoring, mentor, workforce diversity, engagement, employee engagement, inclusive leadership, and promotion aspiration*. Upon completing these searches, additional references were examined to conduct a more thorough literature review. Relevant websites such as Bureau for Labor Statistics and Catalyst were also selected.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory provided a perspective for this literature review. For Hannum (2007), a principle of social identity is that it is human nature to want to fit in, as well as to be unique. Hogg (2004), in defining social identity, noted that one of the most important distinctions in the way people conceive themselves is either through their personal identity or their social identity. As it pertains to leadership, Hogg also asserted that social identity in leadership is a relational process that will be evident in the group or organizational setting. Hogg and Abrams (2007) found that intergroup behavior and social identity may be synergistically critical to each other. In the further definition of social identity theory, Hogg and Abrams stated that maintaining favorable social identity drive motivation to promote distinction between groups.

Stamper and Masterson (2002) found that the organizational socialization process is another way employees perceive their status as either insider or outsider. The social identity lens suggests that one's perception of their place within the intergroup can have a significant impact on their perceptions of possibly reaping the benefits of being in the intergroup (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). Wright and Taylor (2007) found that when intergroup relations have harmony and cooperate, those in the out-group are more likely to display traits, beliefs, and attitudes that are compatible to those from within the intergroup. This theoretical lens recognizes both the role of the intergroup and the individual in the part they play in benefiting from a stronger social identity.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Identity in the Workplace**

Per Obschonka et al. (2012), the engagement in entrepreneurship of employees is affected by the individual's identity within the group of workplace peers. When people manifest their social identity in the workplace, other coworkers might be more sensitive to their behavior and treatment to those belonging to the revealed social identity group (Madera, King, & Hebl, 2012, p. 165). Individuals who lack sufficient group identity can feel valued and supported in their effort to advance when the organization provides role models, mentors, and sponsors (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Emerson and Murphy (2014) further noted that the organization's mission statement and strategy is a cue to beliefs the organizations hold regarding minority groups.

Understanding social identity can be a critical section in the development of an organization's strategy (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Washington (2009) noted that “the

everyday, lived experiences of African American women positioned within an interlocking system of race, gender, and social class is not easily comprehended by White men, White women, or for that matter, African American men” (p. 556). While organizations can impact social identity of all employees, African American women reported far fewer experiences of encouragement to succeed and advance (Key et al., 2012). Office of Personnel Management’s Diversity and Inclusion website (2016) stated, “We strongly believe that a diverse workforce in an inclusive environment will improve individual and organizational performance and result in better value to customers, clients, taxpayers, and other stakeholders.”

### **Organizational Strategy**

Per Park (2015), organizational strategy influences all employees and can be different for each employee. Tyler (2015) defined strategy as an assembly of ideas that can form a vision. Tyler further noted that this assemblage is a "fitting together" of people, their voices and their perspectives on a formalized process. Organizations often use strategy to pull together all its resources (including human resources) to accomplish its mission and goals. Valentine and Hollingworth (2015) defined organizational strategy as a roadmap to guide success in a competitive market that uses many concepts to understand and communicate the process.

Porter (1991) found that strategy is a way that merges the diverse and functional departments for the asset of the entity. As employees come into an organization and work in these diverse departments, the organization's strategy can be instrumental to employees achieving their personal goals. Joensson (2008) noted that as employee participation in



decision making and involvement increases, the feeling of a social identity increases.

Porter (1991) further noted that the activities of an organization define how all the parts and players interrelate. Based on these findings, Porter concluded that with proper strategic choices, the organizations could have more consistency with their strategy that benefits from the synergies of these activities. Diversity and inclusion increase an organization's ability to serve and protect people who have different experiences or backgrounds and enhance its ability to be receptive to different traditions and ideas (OPM, 2016).

Enticott and Walker (2008) found that organizations use strategy as a forward-thinking tool to assess emerging markets for future potential and prepare for upcoming trends. Enticott and Walker further noted that they were confident in the strategy making process and its ability to use stakeholder and networking relationships to enhance overall organizational performance and communication. According to Davis (as cited by Valentine & Hollingworth, 2015),

An organization's system of communication determines the success of implemented strategies. Top-down communication can encourage bottom-up communication. The strategic management process becomes a lot easier when subordinates are encouraged to discuss their concerns, reveal their problems, provide recommendations, and give suggestions. A primary reason for instituting strategic management is to build and support effective communication networks throughout the firm. (p. 214)

Valentine and Hollingworth (2015) also noted that employees experience a more satisfying workplace when the organization commits proper time and resources to developing and implementing useful strategies. Park (2015) found that improved organizational commitment has a positive impact on employee decision-making and financial participation. Delphin-Rittmon, Andres-Hyman, Flanagan, and Davidson (2013) noted that advancing diversity competence throughout the organization is critical and that executive level employees use strategies to promote and support development within a multicultural workplace. Findler, Wind, and Mor Barak (2007) shed light on the growing need for organizations to have a global presence to compete in the diverse marketplace. Organizational strategy is important to understand about diversity and inclusion because it provides a roadmap for employees with diverse backgrounds to find ways they can contribute to and benefit from the organization. The next section provides a more detailed discussion of important research related to diversity and inclusion strategies.

### **Diversity and Inclusion Strategies**

Cunningham (2009) suggested that when effective diversity and inclusion strategies are in place and in a context, that allows for positive effect, it benefits the organization. Shore et al. (2011) suggested that social identity becomes the mode by which individuals build connection and establishes social networks. Cunningham also found that when an organization employs a diversity strategy, it has a moderating effect on the relationship between the diversity strategy and organizational performance. Stevens, Plaut, and Sanchez-Burks (2008) found that many organizations institute "diversity initiatives" that demonstrate a commitment to fostering diversity in the

workplace. Guillaume, Dawson, Otaye-Ebede, Woods, and West (2015) indicated that "growth-oriented and diversity management strategies positively moderate the effects of organizational diversity on performance" (p. 281). Wang and Rafiq (2009) argued that while entrepreneurial values regarding diversity and creativity are critical in the workplace setting, the promotion of goal-oriented behavior through instilling a shared vision to integrate individual learning is equally important.

The modern work settings and functions have been challenged by the changing demographics of the workforce from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous employee demographic base (Thomas, Tran, & Dawson, 2010). Katz and Miller (2016) noted that organization work focused on a wider range of differences, which include sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, nationality, work style, and even more, had forced the collective understanding for these underrepresented and even unrepresented groups. Deane (2013) found that inclusion strategies provide diversity initiatives with the benefits it seeks to reap. Ghorashi and Sabelis (2013) noted that the presentation of perceived and assumed advantages of diverse employees reduces employee feelings of exclusion by other diverse employees. Diversity and inclusion strategies address biases that hold back performance that is affected by a lack of trust and collaboration (Katz & Miller, 2016). Kilian, Hukai, and McCarty (2005) stated,

Every business case should be tailored to the needs of the particular organization and its diversity strategy and can include factors such as: (1) demographic changes in the workforce; (2) the need for visible role models; (3) indicators of an open, inclusive environment; (4) employees' perceptions of the culture and

managerial competency around diversity; (5) the diversity of related stakeholders (customers, suppliers, shareholders); and (6) the benefits of improved creativity, productivity, and resilience derived from a diverse workforce at all levels. (p. 159)

If upper-level management does not strategically bring diversity to the forefront, it will never survive in the workplace and will lack the desired impact (Espinoza, 2007).

Cunningham (2009) addressed the role of building and sustaining a diverse and inclusive workforce and how it creates a significant benefit to the organization. Tyler (2015) noted organizational strategy to cast the vision for the organization, and as it relates to diversity and inclusion, the strategy brings all employees into the vision to both contribute and reap the benefits of the vision. Kundu and Mor (2017) found that employee perceptions of inclusion directly related to organizational performance.

Kravitz (2008) argued that organizational performance is also strengthened through diversity and inclusion initiatives when hiring and promotion is considered in the diversity management strategy and is “colorblind.” Cumberland, Herd, Alagaraja, and Kerrick (2016) identified the need to intentionally develop employees who are either unrepresented or underrepresented. Upon the investment in development, Grabner and Moers (2013) and Klaauw and Dias da Silva (2011) noted that aspirations for advancement for all employees are positively affected.

Eagly and Chin (2010) found that even as men continue to hold many leadership positions, women are beginning to make inroads. Maume (2011) noted that diversity efforts are also having an impact on factors that determine promotions in manufacturing

settings. Levine (2009) acknowledged the advancement in diversity leadership while also stating that much work remains. Per Dozier (2010), this challenge remains especially true for African American women. Rutledge (2007) and Washington (2007) acknowledged that overcoming the challenge, African American women aspiration for advancement is positively impacted by the investment of workplace sponsorships and networking relationships. Castilla (2008) noted that performance perceptions from within the workplace have a direct correlation to promotion and advancement.

### **Minority Employee Engagement Impact from Inclusion Strategies**

Stevens et al. (2008) found that overcoming resistance from nonminority and minority employees is accomplished when the organization develops a positive inclusion strategy that stimulates employee morale. Employees reciprocate with increased engagement when the organizations send signals through diversity practices that their well-being and support is considered (Downey et al., 2015). Findler et al. (2007) found that employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment strengthens when the employee is made to feel he or she belongs to the organization. McKay et al. (2008) noted that work performance is impacted by the organization's attention to the development of a positive work climate.

Rich et al. (2010) suggested that engagement concepts represent both an inclusive view of the employee's authentic self, as well as motivating factors that lead toward greater engagement for improved job performance. Glavas (2016) found that when employees perceived the organizations as having a corporate social responsibility, they revealed a more authentic self in the workplace. The leader that consistently engages

employees creates the condition whereby employee engagement can thrive and find an identity within the organizational culture (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Huang, Wellman, Ashford, Lee, and Wang (2017) found that disengagement is advanced when an employee feels their social contract has been violated by the organizations and other employees. Shuck, Collins, Rocco, and Diaz (2016) suggested that when employees feel a part of the organization, their engagement to the success of the organization and their development increases. Shuck, et al., (2016) additionally noted that employee engagement is proportionally linked to their perception of their contribution and if it is meaningful to them, their team, and the organization. Downey et al. (2015) found that employees exhibit more engagement when made to feel included and thus benefit the organization.

### **Employee Perceptions of Inclusiveness**

Stamper and Masterson (2002) noted that organizations that create the distinction between insider and outsider employees often use inducements such as benefits, training, and promotions to send messages to certain employees that they have earned insider status. Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) found the more one identifies with the group, the greater their perception of inclusiveness with the dominant group culture. Individual differences form the basis for organizational diversity and shape people's perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Hsiao, Auld, & Ma, 2015). Kundu and Mor (2017) noted that the perception of organizational performance is directly aligned with employee perception of gender diversity. Kundu and Mor (2017) also found

that employee perceptions of organizational diversity initiatives influence organizational performance.

The San Francisco-based research and consulting firm Great Place to Work (GPW) found "best" companies treat all employees well, and employees have positive views of their workplaces, management, and more opportunities for career advancement than might be found in companies not selected (Carberry & Meyers, 2016). All members of a workforce must recognize the importance of and be engaged in diversity and inclusion initiatives for it to drive culture change (Sanyal, Wilson, Sweeney, Smith Rachele, Kaur, & Yates, 2015). Sanyal, et al., (2015) also noted that the promotion for diverse employees is beyond the work of just senior leadership members.

### **Diversity in Action: Hiring and Promotions**

Many organizations have made attempts to address diversity issues by increasing effort in diversity hiring initiatives and even making their state of diversity more public. (Brodock & Massam 2016). Emerson and Murphy (2014) suggested that members of a stigmatized group look for physical cues such as hiring and promotions to assess the culture as accepting or welcoming for their social identity. Organizational hiring strategy should “help rather than hurt organizational performance, assuage concerns about possible negative effects on the organization, decrease perceptions of unfairness, decrease opposition, and minimize stigmatization by others and by target group members themselves” (Kravitz, 2008, p. 181). Kundu and Mor (2017) found that diversity categorization and gender has a varying effect on the perceptions of employees towards organizational support for diversity through fair employment practices like hiring and

retaining diverse employees and promotion. The lack of qualified applicants is often suggested as the reason why females and minorities are scarcely represented at the top levels of most professions and not because of any explicit discrimination or barriers to promotion to these top jobs (Bjerk, 2008). Organizational strategy greatly reduces the influence of individual managers who may have long held beliefs about hiring and promoting diverse individuals and supporting individual personal advancement (Saha, 2012).

### **Aspiration for Career Advancement, Diversity Leadership, and Promotion**

The aspiration for career advancement can differ for both men and women (Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Horst, Lippe, & Kluwer, 2014). An employee's position within the workplace opportunity structure affects their possibility of promotion, which in turn affects the importance he or she attaches to being promoted (Cassirer & Reskin, 2000). The placement of men in organizational structure was a significant factor in their promotion aspirations (Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Horst, Lippe, & Kluwer, 2014). Cassirer and Reskin (2000) also found that having regular procedures and structure was a strong impact on the promotion aspirations of women. Horst, et al., (2014) noted that individuals who prioritized his or her career aspirations within defined structures are likely to experience the desired advancement in his or her organization.

Promotions are only as impactful for the organization and individual as it elicits greater contribution to the organization and the employee values the promotion itself (Kosteas, 2011). In senior management positions, the desire for promotion aspirations is greatly affected for women who are more involved in home and family concerns



(Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Horst, Lippe, & Kluwer, 2014; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007).

Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) noted that performance reviews are the time advancement expectations and development opportunities are discussed with employees who aspire for advancement. Career aspirations are affected by the time in a woman's life such as graduating high school, beginning a career, or even at the peak of a career (Gray & O'Brien, 2007).

### **Leadership Development**

Leadership development initiatives are meant to challenge organizations' current status quo of a hierarchical and traditional leadership structure (Cummings et al., 2013). In challenging and changing the status quo, Cummings et al. (2013) also found that this development initiative would also replace the status quo with an "empowering, collaborative, cooperative, and interdisciplinary transformational environment. Emerson and Murphy (2014) noted that organizations often attempt to create identity supporting training initiatives to strengthen inclusiveness feelings of minority leaders. Megheirkouni (2016) found that organizational context, needs, and culture is critical elements in determining leadership development initiatives. With the globalization of organizations and changing workplace diversity, the need to develop leaders is becoming apparent (Cumberland, et al., 2016). Organizations provide diverse leaders with support and guidance through mentoring programs that support the integration of the diverse leader's assimilation with other leaders (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016). Individuals that participate in leadership development initiatives are expected to integrate and apply their

new knowledge and skills for the benefit of the organization and its social fabric (Choy & Lidstone, 2013).

Comments about a noticeable change from peers, development leaders, and the social community were found to have a positive impact on the confidence of employees that participated in leadership development (Choy & Lidstone, 2013). Kravitz (2007) found that social network practices and networking were of great benefit to the development of African American Women and less so for African American men and White females. Shuck and Herd (2012) noted that "leading this new and evolving workforce requires new perspectives of leadership as well as new scaffolding for understanding the complexities of leadership development in an evolving landscape; one that maintains varying levels of identity simultaneously" (p. 157). A prepared new perspective, vision, and model equip the leader of this changing workplace to meet the challenges of an evolving organizational landscape (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

### **Workplace Promotions**

Getting human capital to positively contribute to the organization is a result of the organization valuing their contribution and establishing a means by which the employee thrives and has a vision of potential promotions (Azodi, Mohammadipour, Dehghani, Hamedani, & Shafiee, 2016; Grabner & Moers, 2013). Organizational leadership assessment is a significant determinant in assessing the nature of the task in workplace promotions that result in changes the task (Grabner & Moers, 2013; Klaauw & Dias da Silva, 2011). Maintaining employee's belief that promotions are possible to help the organization maintains high employee satisfaction even for employees not receiving

promotions (Kosteas, 2011). A firm with good growth opportunities would do more internal promotion versus external hiring since they are likely to have more qualified and higher skilled employees for promotion (DeVaro & Morita, 2013). If an organization eliminates discrimination from promotion decisions, more parity would exist in the promotion of men and women (Spilerman & Petersen, 1999).

### **Promotions of Men**

When it came to promotions, Furnham and Petrides (2006) found that men considered as being bright and men, in general, were favored over women. Spilerman and Petersen (1999) found “some evidence that women at higher levels in the management hierarchy received fewer promotions as men at comparable levels” (p. 225). Stumpf and Tymon (2012) noted that men are not easily satisfied with job attainment and career opportunities, but have a higher expectation than women do for job promotions. Damman, Heyse, and Mills (2014) found that the rise to management positions is much faster for men than for women. Career paths to the top were shorter for men because of starting at higher grade levels (Dencker, 2008). Lyness and Heilman (2006) asserted that the correlation between performance ratings and promotions was weaker for men than for women.

Skill, performance, and similarity of task did not have any impact on job promotion outcomes between men and women as men consistently received more desirable job promotions (Blau & Devardo, 2007). García-Izquierdo, Moscoso, and Ramos-Villagrasa (2012) found the difficulty for women to get upper-level positions in organizational settings as compared to men is a well-known researched fact. Given the

workplace leadership demographics tend to be male-dominated and peer input is critical to promotion decisions, men hiring men has a higher likelihood (Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger, & Probst, 2014). Lyness and Schrader (2006) found that men have fewer constraints as compared to women in their mobility and their ability to move into different organizational opportunities.

### **Promotion of Women**

Females are less likely to be promoted into or in management positions primarily because they are often in lower paying positions (Blau & Devardo, 2007; Pema & Mehay, 2010). Pema and Mehay (2010) also found that in similar pay grades; women promotions were equal to or better than that of men in the same pay grade. Cassidy, DeVaro, and Kauhanen (2016) noted that promotion potentials are lower for women than that of men overall and that higher education increases their promotion prospects more than for men. Cassidy et al. further discovered that higher education does increase promotion prospects more for women than men. Beliefs such as think male" paradigm, the lack of a fit model, and role-congruity theory along with constructs such as the double-standard and the double-mind, influence the way women are perceived and thus affect their job promotion potential (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). Nyberg, Magnusson Hanson, Leineweber, & Johansson (2015) found that women with high motivation for career advancement are rewarded with job promotions and higher compensation. Kostea (2010) stated that "the higher opportunity cost for women may also make women less aggressive in pursuing promotions or lead them to spend less time at work, which would also lead to a lower probability of being promoted (p 119)."

Despite all the advancements women have made in the workplace, their status compared to men still demands, even more, organizational initiatives (O'Neill & O'Reilly, 2011). Baert, De Pauw, and Deschacht (2016) found noteworthy evidence of hiring discrimination against females when they apply for jobs at higher position levels. Person-Job fit is considered a critical factor in determining career progression and job promotion decisions for women (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Lyness and Heilman (2006) also found that many upper-level line related positions are viewed as a male-dominated type of positions. Kilian et al. (2005) noted that while mentoring is important to every professional, executive women and people of color acknowledge that having a mentor was an important factor in their career development.

### **African American Women Aspiration for Promotions**

Efforts by executive leadership significantly impact the relationship of women of color promotions and organizational strategy (Ng, 2008). Organizations can further the promotion aspiration of women or hinder that aspiration (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). The main factor of career plateau occurs when the staff is placed in a situation where they do not expect higher promotion, new positions with more responsibilities (Azodi, Mohammadipour, Dehghani, Hamedani, & Shafiee, 2016). A lack of connection with internal politics, lack of a mentor or sponsor, and a lack of networking relationships led to the perception of barriers to pursuing leadership positions (Rutledge, 2007; Washington, 2007). Additionally, Rutledge (2007) found that African American women desire for advancement are also a result of their self-motivation and personal aspiration. Hoobler, Lemmon, and Wayne (2014) stated that “women’s lack of ascension to higher

management is at least partly explained by women not getting the opportunities and encouragement, that is, the critical organizational development, necessary to aspire to upper management positions” (p. 723).

The number of women in the workforce and the changing of roles has caused the evolution of women’s career choices (Gray & O'Brien, 2007). Entering leadership positions for African American women often brings with it challenges not typically afforded other leaders (Stanley, 2009). Cassirer and Reskin (2000) along with other researchers (Gasser, Flint, & Tan, 2000) found the more congruent the gender-related with the type of work (manufacturing or clothing textiles), the great the promotion aspiration for leadership in that type of work. With more democratic attitudes and the view of more women in management, women are viewing and aspiring for these roles with greater desire (Killeen, López-Zafra, & Eagly, 2006).

### **African American Women Promotion into Manufacturing Leadership Positions**

Without intentional efforts by organizations, most employees in lower level jobs lower their expectations and aspiration for promotions (Harlan, 1989). Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, data reveals that 39% of managers in 2015 were women. The number of women and minorities is adversely impacted by the discrediting of performance appraisal (Castilla, 2008). Castilla (2008) also noted that because of lower performance ratings for women and minorities, it has a significant impact on promotion opportunities. Per Catalyst (2008, 2010) data, of all individuals in management positions, 5.3% included African American women. Scales

(2011) noted Catalyst (2009) data that revealed that women of color held 3.2% board seats, as opposed to white women holding 12.2% and men holding 84.8%.

### **Diversity in Leadership**

Using designed and implemented mentoring programs, organizations efforts give all employees opportunities to become integrated to develop their talent and skills (Olson & Jackson, 2009). Olson and Jackson (2009) also found that in one organization and through the mentoring program, people of color in director-level leadership roles tripled from 5% in 2002 to 16% in 2006. In 2016 the number of women in management was 39.1%, African American (7.5%), Asian (6.1%), and Hispanic (9.9%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). With demographic changes in the global workforce, new leader paradigms enable leaders to be responsive to followers (Chin, 2010). Of all Fortune 500 companies, individuals with the titles such as chairman, president, chief executive officer, and chief operating officer, only 6% are women (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Even as white men still occupy most leadership positions, the growing representation of women of racial and ethnic minorities is evident in the United States (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Changes in the landscape of a diverse and global society often bring with it an array of new leadership challenges for maintaining leader effectiveness and for the exercise of leadership overall (Chin et al., 2016). Even as there have been significant increases in women and ethnic minority representation in senior management positions over the past 20 years, women and ethnic minorities continue to experience under representation in executive positions (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Dozier, 2010). Building integration enables diverse leadership to realize it's potential (Maringe,

Lumby, Morrison, Bhopal, & Dyke, 2007). Gasman, Abiola, and Travers (2015) found in higher education that people of color were grossly underrepresented in leadership and this adversely influenced their advancement and promotion potential.

### **Diversity in Manufacturing Leadership**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) data shows the women hold 18.7% manufacturing supervisor or line leadership positions, whereas African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics women hold 9.7%, 3.9%, and 15%, respectively. While getting back in the workforce over the last 20 years have remained constant for women, their advent into more supervisor and leadership positions have not kept pace with their workforce demographic change (Kilian et al., 2005). Maume (2011) discussed the progress made in eliminating race as a criterion in hiring and promotion decisions. Maume (2011) further noted that if this progress is real, the minorities will reap better working conditions and will exude more optimism about career prospects.

Harlan (1998) found that the demographic makeup of manufacturing workforces enables these opportunities for advancement to leadership to also reflect community demography. Harlan also found that these opportunities for advancement leverage workplace diversity to fill open positions and improves working conditions. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) newsletter, *Monthly Labor Review*, "among men, Hispanics had the highest promotion rates in 2010, followed by nonblack, non-Hispanic, and, finally, black workers, whose promotion rates had fallen the fastest". Harlan (1998) found that employees adjust their promotion attitudes with the perceptions of their upward mobility potential.



### **Women in Manufacturing Leadership**

Levine (2009) noted that only a small number of women gain promotions into the challenging positions typically dominated by men or even protest the domination in this system which blocks opportunity. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) data revealed that women employed in manufacturing are comprised of 28.9%, African American women are 10.0%, Asian and Hispanic women are 6.8% and 16.1%, respectively.

Women employed in positions with the title of General Manager or Operation Manager is 29.8%, African American women are 7.1%, Asian and Hispanic women are 5.6% and 11.3%, respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Additionally, women employed in positions with the title of Production Manager is 23.2%, African American women are 4.9%, Asian and Hispanic women are 9.2% and 7.4%, respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). While it is an easier task for women to enter manufacturing, gaining access to advancement opportunities remains challenging (Levine, 2009). Gender inequality is often cited as a factor for women's advancement into higher level positions (Washington, 2007).

### **African American Women in Manufacturing Leadership**

With the advent of higher level requirements of education and skills, the African American woman's value and opportunity declined compared to the white woman in industrial workplaces (Dozier, 2010). Of the manufacturing workforce, women employed in manufacturing management positions is 39.1%, African American women are 7.5%, Asian and Hispanic women are 6.1% and 9.9% respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Dozier (2010) stated that,

The shift in occupational distribution benefited white women far more than black women, partially because more white women moved into professional and managerial positions where their greater educational attainment and growing labor force attachment helped them benefit from new, potentially lucrative opportunities (p. 1857).

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 sought to understand diversity leadership and more specifically the African American woman's place in leadership in aggregate as well as the manufacturing setting. Chapter 2 also sought to understand inclusion's effect on the promotion aspirations of African American women in a manufacturing setting.

Chapter 3 includes the methodology and design used for the research study. A phenomenological qualitative methodology design was the basis for the study. The chapter also included the research questions, population sampling approach, and discussion of informed consent of participants. The chapter included the role of the researcher, examination of instrumentation, data collection, ethical considerations, and research questions. A summary of Chapter 3 information concludes the chapter.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of African American women about the effect inclusion strategies had on their promotion aspiration. The data collection utilized telephone in-depth semi structured interviews. Each interview took between 25 and 45 minutes to complete. The phone interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents and were analyzed using NVivo 11®. To ensure ethical protection of the participants, strict adherence to the parameters established by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was observed and followed. Chapter 3 includes research design, method, rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

### **Research Design**

Data were collected for this qualitative phenomenological study to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 - What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions' perception of organizational inclusion strategies?

RQ2 - What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ3 - What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ4 - What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion?

RQ5 - What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities?

The focus of this study was the effect of inclusion strategies on African American women promotion aspiration and any subsequent job promotions. While the number of African American women has increased in percentage of employees in manufacturing, the number of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions has not kept pace. By choosing a qualitative research method, examination of the lived experiences of African American women provided valuable evidence of effective inclusion strategies to increase promotion aspiration and promotions for this demographic group. The African American women participants who experienced this phenomenon (manufacturing leadership and inclusion strategies) provided an understanding of what they experienced when aspiring to greater manufacturing leadership opportunities.

### **Research Method**

A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study. A semi structured interview model was selected to examine the lived experiences of 10 African American

women who aspired to grow their career in manufacturing. Telephone interviews were scheduled and conducted with each participant.

### **Research Rationale**

A phenomenological research design was chosen because the goal was to set apart African American women's lived experiences. The rationale for using a qualitative phenomenology approach was that this approach allowed the participants to share their experiences and perceptions about what it meant to be an African American woman who aspired to excel and grow their career in manufacturing leadership. Qualitative phenomenology also allowed for the emergence of themes that gave credence to the lived experiences and phenomenon.

### **The Qualitative Paradigm**

The research paradigm used in this dissertation was from a qualitative phenomenological perspective. Giorgi (2012) stated,

to employ the phenomenological reduction means two things: (1) The researcher must bracket personal past knowledge and all other theoretical knowledge, not based on direct intuition, regardless of its source, so that full attention can be given to the instance of the phenomenon that is currently appearing to his or her consciousness, and (2) the researcher withholds the positing of the existence or reality of the object or that he or she is beholding. (p. 355)

Phenomenology is "concerned with the essential structure of cognition and their essential correlation to things that are known" (Husserl, 2002, p. 53). Husserl (2002) believed researchers should seek to understand how individuals assess the world around

themselves. Researchers must view each participant and their lived experiences as unique and based on their perceptions. Husserl emphasized that phenomenological data must be taken from a first-person point of view to record the subject's exact experiences. Due to the interpretative nature of this study, a phenomenology approach was chosen to provide the researcher insight and understanding of African American women and the perceptions of their lived experiences. The use of a phenomenological research approach acknowledges the belief that the lived experiences are subjective and everyone perceives their reality differently. This qualitative, phenomenological research approach provided insight and a change in conscientiousness for organizational leadership to improve inclusive practices.

This dissertation explored the lived experiences of participants to build an understanding of how workplace inclusion strategies affect promotions aspirations of African American women in manufacturing settings. Bebbington and Özbilgin (2013) noted that qualitative research explores the lived experiences of women and minority groups that reveal the enacted and reproduced organizational inequalities. This qualitative paradigm allowed me to build upon a social identity theoretical framework by which inclusion strategies, when used appropriately, can result in increasing the aspirations of African American women to seek leadership positions in manufacturing settings. A qualitative phenomenological inquiry was selected for this study because it uses an approach to explore African American women perceptions on the effect of inclusion strategies on their promotion aspirations. Delgado (2013) noted that phenomenological research method is useful to understand both historical and current data and put into a

context of the lived experience of participants. A phenomenological inquiry provided a method to explore the participant perceptions from their past as well as current experiences that allows for an explanation of what it means to be an African American female leader in the manufacturing workplace setting.

### **Role of the Researcher**

During this phenomenological research study, I served as a participant-observer and as a key instrument in the data collection process. I maintained direct contact with each participant from the recruitment process through each contact whether by phone, e-mail, or face-to-face. Using semi structured interviews with each participant, I conducted very comprehensive one-on-one discussions. After each interview, I transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted the interview contents. Rowley, Jones, Vassiliou, and Hanna (2012) noted that semi structured interviews are useful to support participants to share their attitudes, experiences, knowledge, and understanding about the research topic. I safeguarded all activities of the research to follow the established guidelines of the Walden University IRB by ethical protections of participants.

I observed each participant to ensure their rights were maintained as committed in the signed informed consent agreement. Because the purpose of the interview in this research was to capture the lived experiences of the participant, my role was to keenly observe responses and reactions to ensure the comfort of the participant. Mulhall (2003) found that observation is a discrete activity with a purpose to record physical and verbal behaviors of the participant. Maintaining objectivity and eliminating biases while interviewing and observing participants was my goal.

With social identity as a theoretical base, the factors used to develop interview questions to ascertain the effect inclusion strategies have on promotions aspirations of African American women were as follows:

- Identification of tenure and history in leadership positions
- Pathway and hurdles to become a leader
- Positive and negative perceptions of organizational inclusion initiatives
- Perception of value as a leader and more specifically the feelings of acceptance an African American women leader
- Barriers faced achieving promotion
- Organizational efforts to develop leadership skills and preparation for promotions
- Organizational efforts to inspire for greater responsibility and promotions
- Impact of organization-initiated engagement activities such as sponsors and mentors
- Perception of organizational inclusions strategies
- Improvement suggestions to enhance organizational inclusion strategies that could inspire other employees with diverse backgrounds

Obschonka et al. (2012) noted that identification with workplace peers is a cognitive process that deserves more attention in the study of leadership career decisions among employed individuals.



## **Methodology**

### **Population**

The research population was formed from companies within the industrial area of Chicago, Illinois. Elk Grove Village, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, is the home to the largest industrial business park in North America (Made in Elk Grove Technology and Expo, n.d.). The list of participants included African American women with the title of general manager, operation manager, production manager, supervisor, or other manufacturing leadership positions with responsibility for hourly employee daily work. The participants included African American women who currently had management and leadership responsibility over a group of other employees and under their direct supervision. Relevant information was requested from different institutional experiences and to increase external validity.

### **Sampling Strategy and Criteria**

Potential participants were recruited utilizing an invitation to participate (Appendix A). After providing a personal e-mail, the invitation was sent to the perspective African American woman. The invitation provided them an opportunity to participate in the research. Creswell (2013) noted that the snowball sampling strategy identifies participants of interest who know other participants with similar backgrounds. The proposed number of participants included 10 African American women in manufacturing leadership positions. The number of 10 was sufficient to allow for enough data to identify critical themes. The sample size participants also provided for ample amount of data in the event a participant chooses to ask for removal from the research.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument used to gain the perceptions of participants was a semistructured interview (Appendix A). To accommodate the participants, an interview was scheduled conveniently for the participant. The first process was to establish rapport with the participant to encourage open dialogue and a willingness to share their lived experience. The semistructured interview allowed for the participant to provide as much of their experience as desired. Interviews were recorded to capture accurate experiences of research participants.

**Recruitment**

With a purposive snowball sampling approach, potential research participants were obtained via the LinkedIn search engine. Upon acceptance to participate, participants provided a personal e-mail. Potential participants were sent the invitation to participate and recommendation request (Appendix A) in their personal e-mail. Each participant was also provided with an informed consent form to gain her permission to participate in the research to their personal e-mail. The consent form provided an overview of the research and answers to participants to support the participation decision.

**Data Collection**

The primary data collection method was the use of in-depth semistructured interviews. Creswell (2013) noted that the interview process is an iterative technique to gather information from participants. Creswell further noted that the interview could give meaning to the lived experience of the participant in qualitative research. Data collection consisted of African American women participating in a one-on-one interview with the

research. The initial part of the interview involved building rapport and gaining permission from the participant to proceed by getting them to sign the consent form. The second phase of the interview provided an overview of the research and to gather information about the participant's workplace experiences and perception regarding organizational inclusion strategies and their aspirations for promotions. The final phase of the interview was a review and verification of the interview notes and thanking the participant for their time.

The interview process included the use of probing questions, participant responses, and follow-up questions for clarity of participant responses. This probing technique in interviewing made gaining depth with the participant possible. The work of the researcher and participant was best served when rapport was established through the interview process. Burns (2006) noted that the interview process is a process of reflexivity.

In the reflexivity technique, Burns (2008) further suggested that the role of the researcher's self is critical in the interview setting and the impact associated with the interaction between researcher and participant. The use of interviews within the study provided the research with multiple sources of data to merge and find common themes. As common themes emerge from participants, it provided the researcher with further themes upon which to probe. Common themes emerge from the probing with open-ended questions typically used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

To address the first research question (What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions' perception of organizational inclusion strategies?), each participant was asked the following questions:

- How long have you been a formal leader in manufacturing and what roles did you have prior to your current position?
- Tell me about a time when the organization's inclusion strategy positively changed your perception of the organization.
- Tell me about a time when the organization's inclusion strategy negatively changed your perception of the organization.
- Since being employed by this organization, how has the organizational inclusion strategies made you as an African American woman feel included and valued for your leadership skills?

These are Questions 1 through 4 in Appendix A.

To address the second research question (What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions), each participant was asked the following questions:

- Tell me about any barriers you encountered when attempting to move into a manufacturing leadership position?
- What efforts have been provided by the organization to improve your leadership skills and enhance your leadership reputation among your peers?

- Have you had a leader sponsor, mentor, been included in leader-employee social events, organizational affinity groups, or other inclusion building activities? If so, which initiative had the most impact on your perception of inclusion and why?

These are Questions 5 through 7 in Appendix A.

To address the third research question (What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions), each participant was asked the following questions:

- Tell me about any organizational inclusion strategy that has increased your desire to become more engaged in the workplace success and what did you do differently to become engaged?
- Tell me about your experience with a leader sponsor, mentor, inclusion in leader-employee social events, organizational affinity groups, or any other inclusion building activities and how any of these initiatives increased your aspiration for promotion opportunities?
- How has any of the organizational inclusion strategies benefited your development and preparation for promotion into leadership positions or absorbing greater responsibilities?

These are Questions 8 through 10 in Appendix A.

To address the fourth research question (What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-

employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion), each participant was asked the following questions:

- Tell me about any organizational initiated leader development program and how it has inspired you toward seeking other leadership positions.
- Tell me about any organizational leadership development effort and how the effort negatively or positively affected your perception of the organization.

These are Questions 11 through 12 in Appendix A.

To address the 5<sup>th</sup> research question (What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities), each participant was asked the following questions:

- Tell me about any organizational inclusion strategy that has inspired and encouraged you to aspire for greater involvement in leadership?
- What actions could your organization take to inspire you to desire further growth in your professional career?

These are Questions 13 through 14 in Appendix A.

In qualitative research, the interaction between researcher and participant becomes a rich dialogue to further enhance the study. Burns (2006) stated that,

This has important implications for critical qualitative psychology in that working reflexively with these ideas can contribute to the development of innovative methodologies, enrich data collection, extend the analyses we produce and, importantly, underpin our ethical commitments. (p. 14)

The collected data from the participant became invaluable to the researcher's effort better understand the research problem and provided qualitatively verified data as evidence in the research findings. Each participant was made aware they would have an opportunity to verify the accuracy of response to the inquiry before data is considered for the research.

### **Data Storage**

Each participant was interviewed by phone with the researcher. The interview used a protocol (Appendix A) which recorded the perceptions and responses of the participants. The interview questions were developed to gain a greater understanding for each of the research questions and understand how participant social identity was positively or negatively affected by the organizational inclusion strategies. The consent form was reviewed at the beginning with each participant. A request was made by the researcher to ensure permission to record the interview with a digital voice recorder. Each interview is filed and saved in a secure database on the researcher's private computer. Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcribing organization and stored in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher. The professional transcribing organization was required to sign a confidentiality agreement form (Appendix B) before being given participant data. All identifying information of participants was removed from the transcripts before the verification procedure.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon completing the organization of the participant data and printing, the interview transcripts were analyzed using an electronic coding system. Gaining a firm

grasp of the transcript was the first step to understand the meaning of the participant experience. The second step highlighted the statements that had relevance to the phenomenon being studied. In this study, extracting relevant statements to understand how African American women experienced inclusion strategies and whether they were inspired to pursue promotions to leadership positions, was the focus. The third step included the labeling of statements to understand what inclusion strategies were most effective and which strategies were limiting factors. The final step in analyzing the data involved the development of individual and group descriptions of participant experiences. The participant grouped experiences provided content to determine the clustering of themes. Moustakas (1994) noted that composite descriptions of the meaning and essence of the participant experiences form thematic connections. With this composite description of a group of African American women who have experienced organizational inclusion strategies and gain perceptions regarding the effect on their promotion aspirations, a better understanding of their experiences was provided.

For this qualitative analysis, NVivo 11® was used to properly account for the number of times qualitative themes and codes occurred. This data was then used to distinguish impact upon the participants as it related to the actions of the organization. The use of NVivo 11® also helped ensure the codes denoted an area of influence and effect versus the repetitiveness of the respondents. The data from the participants placed in categories of frequency of themes within a sample, the percentage of themes associated with a given category of participants, and the percentage of participants selecting specific



themes were key measures of data that was used to seek, find, and place in NVivo 11 for analysis.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Participants were made aware the records of this study will be kept private. In any report or publication that might be shared from this research, no shared information will make it possible to identify a participant. The immersion of the researcher in the understanding of the lived experiences of the participant was described by Moustakas (1986) as “being in” with the participant. Moustakas (1986) further stated that this “being in” represents a new experience for the participants but can lead to the unfolding of new insights to construct new behaviors and action in others. Once “being in” was established with the participant, the setting of the interview tone commenced with open-ended questions. As participants openly shared their personal experiences, they also understood a pseudonym protected their identity. While each participant provided their unique experiences, the lived experiences of the African American women in manufacturing leadership positions, offered many similar experiences.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Member checking was a critical component to verifying and validating the participant responses. Drost (2011) noted that reliability is the act of repeating research methods in different settings, different occasions, and different conditions and yet obtain the same results. Documenting the detailed descriptions and perspectives by the researcher to generate themes gave credibility to the collected responses of the from the participants. Cross verification of responses from participants were sources in the sample.

There was not any justification to question the verification or credibility of the data because participants openly shared their stories and experiences.

### **External Validity**

The purposeful sampling approach allowed individuals to participate who had experience with the research phenomenon and met the study criteria. Tony (2014) suggested that live settings offered high external validity, internal validity, and application of research findings. To establish credibility, the researcher had to document very descriptive details of the participant responses and generate realistic and transferable themes.

### **Dependability**

The participant raw data, information about theme development, and the generation of findings and conclusions provided the foundation for an audit trail. Participant transcribed interviews were also available to support the audit trail. Hagood and Skinner (2015) noted that dependability is the fitting match between data collection methods, research objectives, research setting, and representative objects. Documentation of each research method and adherence to this methodology enables future researchers to audit and duplicate the methods.

### **Confirmability**

Once interviews were completed, transcribed, and analyzed, the process of checking and rechecking data during the data collection and data analysis was established and followed. Creswell (2013) noted that verification is an accepted strategy that documents the accuracy of the study. As the researcher, the goal was to provide a strategy

that built confidence for participants, readers, and future researchers. Confirmability ensured the findings reflected the participant responses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The acceptance of the consent form establishes the initial rapport needed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the participant (Creswell, 2013). Before beginning the data collection process, participants were provided a copy of the informed consent form through e-mail. The consent form contained information regarding the nature of the study, the rights of the participant to withdraw at any time, and any potential physical or psychological risk the participant might experience. The participants were informed that they did not have to complete any part of the study with which they had discomfort.

The participants were informed they their information would be maintained in a confidential setting with the researcher. They were made aware that a pseudonym would be used in the submitted research and any other publication to protect their identity. The researcher committed to adhering to Walden University IRB guidelines for the protection of human participants during the research. The conformance included obtaining IRB approval before beginning data collection.

### **Summary**

In summary, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American women and organizational inclusion strategies that affect their aspiration for promotion. Participants took part in a semistructured phone interview with the researcher. Each interview was transcribed and then analyzed using

NVivo 11® to identify common themes and codes. Walden University's IRB guidelines were used to ensure the ethical protection of research participant. Upon receiving the electronically signed consent form from each participant, an interview was confirmed that was convenient for the participant.

The audio-taped recorded interview, the transcript, and all other data are kept in a secured location at the home of the researcher on the researcher's personal password-protected computer. The participants were informed that all access to the data resided with the researcher and will be shared with the dissertation committee. They were also made aware the data will be maintained for at least five years per Walden University guidelines. Participants were provided email contact information of the researcher and the dissertation committee chair in the event they have questions or concerns about the research was made available to the participants. Additionally, participants were provided contact information for the Walden University representative if they felt the need to talk privately about their rights as research participants. Finally, participants will be e-mailed a summary report of the research findings after completion and approval of the study.

Chapter 3 also included a review a review of research method, research design and rationale, and finally issues of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 present the research findings, participant profiles, data analysis, research question summaries, and found associated themes.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

In this phenomenological study, the purpose was to explore and examine the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women who held operational leadership positions in manufacturing settings. The goal was to understand the effect of organizational inclusion strategies on promotion aspirations and what strategies were most effective increasing their aspiration and promotions in the manufacturing. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1 - What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions' perception of organizational inclusion strategies?

RQ2 - What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ3 - What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions?

RQ4 - What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion?

RQ5 - What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities?

In this chapter, the research findings of this study are presented. First, the setting and background are explained to provide contexts for the results. Finally, the shared experiences of the participants and the supported analysis of the participant experiences are also presented.

### **Research Setting**

The manufacturing workplace environment is a critical factor to contextualize the lived experiences of the research participants. As found in Chapter 2, manufacturing leadership has a lower ratio of African American women than many other demographic groups. While data revealed African American women had gained in overall manufacturing population, the data also revealed a slow proportion of African American women promotions into manufacturing leadership positions. Chapter 2 also showed a highly dominated male presence in the total workforce as well as the manufacturing leadership positions. While the Chapter 2 literature review showed an organizational effort to build diverse and inclusive workplaces, the manufacturing industry had shown a lower transition to more diversity in leadership. In this qualitative phenomenological study, perceptions and experiences of African American women who work or have worked and progressed in operational leadership positions in a manufacturing setting were examined. Chicago, Illinois was the area of research due to its large population and large manufacturing organizational base. Elk Grove Village, a suburb of Chicago, has the highest ratio of manufacturing locations per square miles in the United States.

### Participant Demographic Data

As outlined in Table 1, age, the number of manufacturing leadership promotions, and years in manufacturing were gathered.

Table 1

#### *Participants Demographic Characteristics*

Participant	Age	Number of Manufacturing Leadership Promotions	Years in Manufacturing Leadership Position
1	37	2	11
2	30	5	7
3	33	2	7
4	48	8	23
5	51	11	23
6	44	8	16
7	56	3	21
8	50	6	12
9	50	5	20
10	46	5	8
<b>Average</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>14.5</b>

### Participants' Profiles

Leader 1 is currently a complex business leader for a manufacturing company. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 2007. Since her first role in a

production supervisor capacity, she has achieved two additional promotions. She has completed Bachelor of Science and Master of Business Administration degrees.

Leader 2 is currently a senior manager of manufacturing operations. She has been in manufacturing leadership positions since 2011. Her first leadership position in manufacturing was as production supervisor. She has achieved five promotions during her career. She has obtained a Bachelor of Science degree.

Leader 3 is currently a production supervisor in her organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 2011. She has achieved two additional promotions with similar responsibilities. She has completed Bachelor of Science and Master of Business Administration degrees.

Leader 4 is currently a vice president of operations within her organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 1995. Since her first role in production supervisory leadership, she has achieved eight additional promotions. She has met requirements for a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Business Administration degrees.

Leader 5 is currently a vice president of operations within her organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership positions since 1995. Her first role was in a supervisory production capacity, and she has achieved 11 additional promotions or higher-level positions. She has achieved Bachelor of Arts and Master of Business Administration degrees.

Leader 6 is currently head of Americas for operations in her organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 2002. In addition to holding her first



leadership position as a production supervisor, she has achieved eight additional promotions. She has completed Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees.

Leader 7 is currently the director of manufacturing operations within her current organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 1997. Since her first role in a production supervisor position, she has achieved three additional promotions. She has achieved Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees.

Leader 8 is currently an area management leader for a manufacturing company. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 2006. Since her first position in manufacturing supervision, she has achieved six additional promotions. She has obtained Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees.

Leader 9 is currently the director of manufacturing for engineering and facilities within her organization. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 1998. After first leading in a production supervisor position, she has achieved five additional promotions. She has achieved Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees.

Leader 10 is currently a senior process and production leader for a manufacturing company. She has been in a manufacturing leadership position since 2010. Since her first role in production leadership, she has achieved five additional promotions. She has achieved Bachelor of Science and Master of Business Administration degrees.

### **Data Collection**

I used the LinkedIn search tool for this study to find African American women in the Chicago, Illinois area with the following position titles:

- Manufacturing supervisor

- Manufacturing leader
- Foreman
- Plant manager
- Plant supervisor
- Plant superintendent
- Operational leader
- Operational supervisor

Using purposeful sampling, I identified 52 African American women in the Chicago, Illinois area with these or similar position titles. A total of 52 invitations to participate and recommendation request (Appendix A) were sent to potential participants through the LinkedIn online professional network. Initial invitation to participate in the study was determined by the individual's profile photograph and position title. To qualify as a participant, respondents from LinkedIn had to meet the following criteria:

- Be an African American woman
- Be in Chicago, Illinois (or within the Chicago Statistical Area, which is comprised of a 16-county area and is about a 45-mile radius from the city center)
- Previously held or currently holds a leadership position in a manufacturing operational setting
- Willing and able to respond to interview questions

Of the 52 African American women who met the criteria and received the invitation to participate and recommendation request (Appendix A), 11 answered and

returned the informed consent form. Ten African American women met the criteria and consented to be interviewed. The participants were African American women in entry-level manufacturing supervisor positions up to women who began in entry-level positions and have now progressed to upper-level manufacturing operational leadership positions. Additionally, some participants were recommended by other participants in the interview process.

The recruitment began very slow in October 2017 and continued to proceed with very little interest. Invitations to participate continued to be sent to potential participants until January 24, 2018. The recruitment and data collection took place from October 5, 2017, through January 24, 2018. When a potential participant responded with interest and an e-mail address, the consent form was sent to them. Upon receiving the consent form, participants were asked to provide a time convenient to their schedule for the phone interview.

The interview protocol and research questions (Appendix A) guided each interview. Each participant was asked the questions as outlined in Appendix A. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 45 minutes. Each participant was made aware of the number of questions in the interview. Because of the open-ended questioning interview structure, 6 out of 10 participants' responses to Question 4 unknowingly provided responses and information relevant to questions related to types of inclusion strategies. The types of inclusion strategies were to be part of Questions 7, 8, and 9. They provided both negative and positive perspectives regarding these strategies. The interview discontinued when participant responses reached the point of saturation, or no

other insightful perceptions emerged. The data consisted of 52 pages of transcribed interviews. NVivo 11® was used to help organize, sort, and track the frequency of themes. I read each transcript extensively to validate for accuracy.

Each transcribed interview was sent back to the participant to verify the accuracy of their statements as committed by the member check process. Upon receiving an affirmative response from each participant, the transcript was entered in the NVivo 11® for further analysis. All the data from the research consisted of exact responses from the African American women in manufacturing leadership positions in the Chicago, Illinois area. Participants could verify, change, and confirm their responses during the member checking process.

### **Data Analysis**

Before beginning the analysis, my personal and professional experiences and viewpoints as the researcher were separated to allow the participant shared experiences to emerge. The isolated and bracketing of my perspective ensured the African American women's lived experiences achieved their intent. I remained in the position of a doctoral student during each interview and listened to the lived experiences of each participant. As the researcher, I asked each participant the same questions until saturation emerged or no new themes emerged. If participants required clarity of a question, I restated the question. None of the participants made content changes to their transcripts during the member check process, and the data were complete for further analysis.

All transcribed interviews were organized and analyzed using NVivo 11®. The NVivo 11® computer software analysis tool was used to assign codes and facilitate

frequent words and text search. Several themes emerged from the participant responses and are arranged by research questions in this chapter.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

To ensure the credibility of the research, manual analysis of the data and NVivo 11® was used. Each interview was transcribed and uploaded to the NVivo 11®. Moon, Blackman, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, and Adams (2016) suggested that credibility and research implementation success is impacting the believability of the findings by the reader. After the organization of the data, coding immediately started. Along with an audio recording device, note taking provided accuracy of participant statements. All the data consisted of the exact words of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions in the Chicago statistical metropolitan area. Member checking took place by returning the transcribed interview to the participant and letting them verify the accuracy of their transcribed interview. The interview data consisted of very personal experiences of each participant. As each participant openly shared their lived experiences, it gave credibility to the data. Because each participant willingly provided their experiences, there was no reason to question the credibility.

#### **Transferability**

The themes in this research provided new insights and added value to the study of inclusion strategies, promotion aspirations, and African American women in manufacturing leadership. Moon et al. (2016) noted that researchers should state the extent of findings is crucial may or may not be relevant to other contexts. Further

research should take place to determine the transferability of the research themes in such areas as African American women, inclusion, diversity, mentor, race, gender, aspirations, workplace promotion, and leadership. Other organizational sectors and different underutilized and underrepresented demographic groups are valued areas to test themes for transferability. Chapter 5 provides other potential areas for research on the themes found in this research.

### **Identification of Key Themes**

After an examination of the hard copy interview transcripts and the generation of themes related to each research question, key term recognition was the process to validate identified themes. Participant quotations were examined for frequency and repeated terms. The data was examined and reexamined until new words and thought patterns emerged. NVivo 11® analytical tool was used to further examine and find key terms and patterns used by participants. Word examinations included the words: *inclusion, included, strategy, commitment, supportive, supported, mentor, guide, guidance, social, aspiration, leadership development, and training.*

As a qualitative phenomenological study, the lived experiences of inclusion strategies effect on the promotion aspirations of African American women in manufacturing leadership were examined. The reaffirming responses contributed to the development of themes related to the effect inclusion strategies had on the promotion aspirations of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions. The words spoken by participants identified and described how the perceptions of various factors such as mentoring, employee resource groups, leadership development, race, and

several other factors contributed to the current and future representative percent of African American women in manufacturing leadership. Seven major themes emerged from the interview responses. The major themes included

- inclusion strategy commitment;
- supportive leadership alignments;
- committed mentoring;
- inclusion guidance;
- social inclusion;
- aspirational support; and
- leadership development.

Clear detection of themes emerged after the analysis of the participant's shared stories. For clarity, the focus on the effect of inclusion strategies guided the organization and identification of themes. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) noted that analysis begins by looking for common statements and thoughts in participant transcripts; identifying labels for codes that emerge which are reflective of more than one key thought; and then forming the initial coding scheme which becomes the axis upon which subthemes are built. The NVivo 11® analytical tool was used to identify subthemes and words that appeared most frequently. These repeated words were used to form axial codes. Axial coding is a process that emphasizes causal relationships and fits things into basic and generic relationship frames (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The axial codes were critical in the identification of the emerging patterns from the participant transcripts. Tables 2 through 6 show the relationship between the subtheme, axial codes, and the emerged themes. Each

table also provides the percent of participants whose transcript responses aligned with the emerged theme.

Seven themes emerged in the analysis of the participant transcripts. The themes were identified using hand coding and NVivo 11®-word map analysis (Appendix C) and word count analysis (Appendix D).

Research Question 1: What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions' perception of organizational inclusion strategies? This question was answered using Theme 1, inclusion strategy commitment, and Theme 2, supportive leadership alignment. Theme 1 emerged from (a) participant statements regarding organization and strategy and (b) the number of times the word *organization* was used (Appendix D). Organizational commitment to communicated strategies was the impetus that drove positive participant perspectives and the identification of themes for this research question. While all 10 participants referenced organizational strategy, eight of the 10 spoke from a positive perspective. The two participants that responded negatively responded that the lack of strategy commitment created a lack of engagement and promotion aspiration. Theme 2 emerged as participants reflected upon long-term support from organization leaders for their growth and development. Participant perspectives also reflected their feeling of moral support that inspired them to pursue greater career growth.

Research Question 2: What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity



groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions? This research question was answered using Theme 3, committed mentoring, and Theme 4, inclusion guidance.

Theme 3 emerged from participants' statements regarding consistent and sustained support from organizational assigned mentors. While all participants provided statements regarding mentors, eight out of 10 spoke with greater certainty about the role the mentor played in their life and professional development. Additionally, Theme 4 materialized from the participant statements regarding the professional guidance provided by identified mentors. Eight out of 10 participants shared experiences that revealed the effort by their mentor to include them in meetings and settings in which they would have otherwise been excluded. Several of the participants shared the value they gained by having access to the broader knowledge in these new settings.

Research Question 3: What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions? This research question was answered using Theme 5, Social Inclusion. Theme 5 emerged from the participant's statements regarding affinity groups and employee resource groups. All ten participants provided a reflection about the role of employee resource groups and the effort by the organization to create these groups as an inclusion strategy. Participants stated the affinity or employee resource groups created an opportunity to form relationships with people of similar backgrounds. They also acknowledged that the strategy created networks to a broader audience within the organization. Appendix D shows a combined high word count for the words *person*,

*groups, people, and included.* These terms were associated with being part of employee resource groups.

Research Question 4: What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion? Theme 6, Aspirational Support, emerged to highlight the effect inclusion strategies had on the participant aspiration. The support from the organization inspired and motivated the participant to become more engaged and be confident to seek advanced career growth. Eight out of ten participants provided positive statements about the role the organizational support had on their aspiration for greater success. Appendix C NVivo 11®-word map reveals the magnitude of the word "organization." As participants had a positive experience with the organization, they also reflected an aspiration for leadership promotions.

Research Question 5: What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities? Theme 7, Leadership Development, emerged out of participant statements regarding the organizational effort to develop them as leaders and prepare them for career growth. Nine out of ten participants provided very specific examples of the organizational strategy to develop leadership skills. When the program was formalized and structured, participants provided experiences that revealed a positive perspective on their preparation for

advancement. As seen in the NVivo 11®-word map (Appendix C), “leadership” and “development” were used a significant number of times.

This study intended to understand the perceptions of African American women and the effect inclusion strategies had on their promotion aspirations. The thorough examination of participant interview responses provided repeated experiences for theme identification. The frequency and consistency of quotes and statements from the participants contributed to the identification of themes. The research findings below are presented by research questions, related significant themes, and relevant lived experiences from participant interview responses.

### **Study Results by Research Question**

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was, “What were successful African American women in manufacturing leadership positions’ perception of organizational inclusion strategies? According to the response from participants, knowing the existence of and seeing evidence of a consistent commitment to an organizational inclusion strategy was a factor in their perception. Barton and Ambrosini (2013) found that middle managers will lack engagement when a lack of commitment to strategy is seen among senior leaders. The participant responses revealed a belief that clear organization commitment to inclusion and equal promotion opportunity was a more engaging organization.

**Theme 1: Inclusion strategy commitment.** Developing and displaying a consistent commitment to the promoted inclusion strategy has a significant effect on the promotions aspirations of African American women in leadership positions. Over half of

the participants commented on their knowledge of or lack of knowledge of the organizational inclusion strategy. Engagement in growth initiatives became the output of participants after they learned of the organization's inclusion strategy. One participant noted,

One of the things the company did well as they led by example, from higher leadership on down, and made sure that people were feeling included, making sure that the diversity initiatives were being met, and making sure that we were just doing the right thing from a talent perspective. What I would say is when I've seen it work is when people walk the talk and do that, and that just breeds the right culture (LEADER 6)

Another participant stated,

At the first manufacturing facility that I worked, I was an hourly worker. Two leaders, an African American male, and a Caucasian female, who said, "you could be a leader," approached me. They were both leaders at that facility. They said, "We have seen your work ethic and the way you do things. You could definitely be a leader." They both basically mentored me. When the next opportunity came, I signed up for it. I would not have signed up for it had they not reached out to me because I didn't see myself in that role at that time (LEADER 5).

These two above responses revealed organizational show of commitment to inclusions strategies which affect the promotion aspirations of African American women for higher leadership opportunities. Another participant shared,

My organization has probably been one of the few companies who had an environment where they had mentorships set up. And after working there for five years, that pretty much changed my trajectory in my career. Because I had people around me that cared about my career and were willing to commit time to me as a mentor in that type of capacity (LEADER 7)

While several participant responses revealed the positive impact of organizational commitment to inclusion strategies, responses also acknowledged the lack of commitment and the perceptual implications. One participant stated,

The organization inclusion strategy that I am currently in is very unorganized. They do not know exactly which way they want to go. So now, it's becoming a shift because we have the director of operations heading our current plant (LEADER 1).

Another participant shared,

I have worked for organizations where not only was it more difficult for women, it was more difficult for minorities. And that type of environment, it just totally changes your look on the company overall. And you feel as though you're in a fight or flight type of situation, I must fight for everything I get (LEADER 7).

Another participant stated,

“They have always said there was some type of inclusion strategy but we never really saw it come to fruition. For instance, we just now have an African American woman that is in one of the higher leadership roles (LEADER 2).”

This theme-Inclusion strategy commitment-was emphasized by more than half the participants. The lived experiences of the participants identified the effect organizational commitment to published inclusion strategies has on participant perceptions. Consequently, the lack of strategy or lack of commitment to publicized inclusion strategies had an adverse impact on the inclusion strategy perceptions of these African American women.

**Theme 2: Supportive leadership alignment.** The research findings indicated that when there was an alignment with in-group leadership, perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies were enhanced with African American women. These findings confirm research by Crepaz, Jazayeri, and Polk (2017) who found that in-group participation played a significant factor in building trust. Observing different leadership behaviors and actions, African American women participants sought alignment to gain more in-group skills without compromising self-identification. LEADER 5 stated,

At my organization, I would get assigned another company officer mentor from another area specifically. It did not quite seem the same with this other arrangement as it did with my mentor. If I reflect, it was probably a couple of reasons why. I think (Mentor's name), and I was far enough apart from each other that I had nothing but respect and consideration for him. I just wanted to learn as much as I could for him. He was no threat or risk of anything regarding me from a career standpoint. He could just literally pour in and see it as a garden that he was producing fruit with (LEADER 4).

Another participant stated,

As a manufacturing manager, as the plant manager's director, that's when I started sitting in a lot more meeting with other directors, other vice presidents, and the president. I would say the two things in my career that made me finally see it is when I became plant manager. Then I met with the president of the company once a month (LEADER 9).

LEADER 9 further stated,

Now understand, from 2007 when I started meeting with the president of the company on a regular basis, all the way up through the time I left the company, I was starting to get included in a lot of decision-making processes and included with other VPs and meeting on a regular basis with other VPs. In 2013, I believe it was, Company X created a leadership training program where they chose a group of, I think, it was about 15 of us that they pegged as being potentially the next VPs of the company. I was included in that training program. For me, even though it was happening all along, I think that was the first time I said, "Oh, my God, somebody else sees it (LEADER 9).

While several participants conveyed a positive and supportive leadership alignment, some have had the counter experience. One participant stated,

Currently, people in those leadership roles were not equipped to handle those positions. So, I could not learn from the people that oversaw me (LEADER 1).

Another participant stated,

It was so much who you know, rather than your abilities or your potential. It was who you know, you're related to, who ... It was that type of environment. And it

makes it very, very difficult to want to become the best at what you do, or hone your skills, and you get discouraged very quickly, immediately you're like, "Okay this is really not the place for me because I'm not going to grow here (LEADER 7).

This theme-supportive leadership alignment-was framed either positively or negatively by every participant. As seen in Table 2, at least 7 or 8 (70% and 80%) of the 10 participants acknowledged the positive effect organizational commitment to inclusions strategies had on their promotion aspirations. Table 3 shows the similar effect supportive leadership had on their promotion aspirations.

Table 2

*Emerged Theme 1*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Inclusion Strategy Commitment	Corporate support to promote inclusion	Organization (107), company (76), program(s) (29), business (22)	70%
	Perceptions of Organization support	Organizational (43), perceptions (38))	70%
	Strategic Commitment to Inclusion	Inclusion (107), strategy (44), strategies (35	80%



Table 3

*Emerged Theme 2*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Supportive Leadership Alignments	Support from leaders	Leader(s) (100), manager (31), barriers (21)	70%

The responses give credence to the impact that organizational inclusion strategy commitment and supportive leadership alignment had on African American women perceptions of organizational inclusions strategies. The next two themes aligned with research question two and explain more voluntary initiatives taken by organizations to affect African American women perceptions.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question was, “What were the perceptions of whether African American women were affected by the organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions? While organizations provide many differing inclusion strategies, the strategies in the research question were asked of participants to determine if any of these affected their perceptions. Noaks, J., and Noaks, L. (2009) found that peer mediation influences the learner's ownership, as well as, develops self-confidence. According to responses from participants, mentoring and leader sponsorship had the most effect in impacting their perceptions. When a mentor

displayed a commitment to the African American women leader and their development, the participant responses revealed the immediate positive impact on attitudes.

**Theme 3: Committed mentoring.** The research findings reveal that all participants discussed mentoring and the impact it had on their perception of organizational inclusion strategies, promotion aspiration, engagement, and their commitment to enhancing their professional development. When the mentor relationship was established and taken seriously by the mentor, it became a source of encouragement and motivation for the participant. When the mentor made a minimal effort, the participant provided greater negative perceptions of the organization inclusion strategies. When the mentor displayed a commitment to the mentee, the mentee perceptions of inclusion strategies revealed positive impact. One participant stated,

The second thing that I had the privilege of participating in was: The company leader also asked his Chief of HR to help him identify top minority talents so that he could start the first mentoring program and start from the top. The company leader and his 13 direct reports were assigned one of us - the 13 minorities that were the high potential leaders. We would be on our own to meet monthly with our directly aligned mentor. That was huge because I was about eight years into my career as a growing leader and to be paired with a gentleman who looking nothing like me – who had the ear of one of mostly highly respected businessmen. As my mentor, he was absolutely amazing. I would have to find a language to learn how to have meaningful conversations with him and for me. Once we were

able to transcend that, then I found myself in a place of real sponsorship throughout my career at the company (LEADER 9).

Another participant noted,

If I'm in the right organization, the right environment, where I'm being recognized and acknowledged, that has made me feel valued. Where I've been given power as a leader, those are two things that have worked for me, as well. Then, if I'm also being able to have a network of other leaders that, you know, diversity or non-diversity, that I can connect with that allows me to feel valued, as well (LEADER 6).

Similarly, another participant stated,

There is an inclusion group called the FEW, that is by invitation only. It is for individuals that report directly to a CEO or one below that. It is a yearlong program. I have gone and completed the program. They talk about the things from leaders. You hear “directly” from these leaders of big companies. What their past has been, challenges, and frankly they talk about things that get talked about when talking about inclusion (LEADER 5).

Finally, another participant shared,

There was a mentor/mentee program. You came into the program with a mentor. That person is someone that is already a leader in the company. It was either your director manager or someone above them. As you began your career, you could understand what your resources in the company were, what types of jobs I could do here, the career, and any questions that would come up that were work-related

or even outside of work. This would be a person you could go to with concerns or questions. Being in that program before getting into manufacturing was very helpful because you had someone to go to when you are fresh out of college and to gain insight (LEADER 2).

As many of the participants shared lived experiences regarding mentoring and the positive impact on their perception of whether inclusion strategies influences promotion aspirations, other participants mentoring experiences left a less positive effect. Two of the participants lost hope in the organizational effort to support their promotion aspirations. They also saw their careers either remain stagnant at their current company, or they sought other opportunities outside their current organization. One participant stated,

On paper, we have mentor programs but they don't work. They will say we have a mentorship program sign up. You will then sign up for a mentor. All that you will do is go to dinner one time. They are too busy and bogged down to even take that task on. Their boss may have told them that they had to do it for their performance evaluation. It is more so a "checking the box." It is not really worthwhile to either party involved (LEADER 3).

Another participant shared,

As far as mentorship programs, there are not any mentorship programs currently. Personal development for this company is slim to none. I go outside of the organization and include myself with Black professionals, and networking events. I go outside and am actually a part of plenty of groups that I can become diverse with different avenues (LEADER 1).

The positive impact provided in the lived experiences by 8 of the 10 participants suggest that mentoring as an inclusion strategy had a significant effect on the women in this study. Except for affinity groups, which theme five discusses, the other questioned strategies, leadership sponsor, inclusion in leader-employee social events, or any other inclusion building activities, had a minimal mention from participants. In addition to the positive impact from committed mentoring, also highlighted as seen in theme 4, is inclusion guidance.

**Theme 4: Inclusion guidance.** Each of the women came into the organization with some degree of self-motivation after having completed some level of higher education. All participants had completed at least a college bachelor's degree. Griffith and Larson (2016) noted that the greater the trust in a leader, the greater the follower listens to the advice and guidance of the leader. As with most employees who enter a new workplace, each participant availed herself to opportunities for professional development. Because of their ethnic and gender difference, the organizational effort to guide their inclusion was mentioned by several of the participants. One participant stated,

I truly felt like I had a great network in that first role and then moving into a manufacturing setting. It becomes difficult moving into a leadership position just being young and from my perspective being a woman of color and being in an area where you are not familiar with anybody. I feel like I had a very good support network in making that transition from people who looked like me and who didn't look like me (LEADER 2).

Another participant shared,

I was very much actively involved in understanding the rest of the business. Both the current businesses that we were in as well as any new acquisitions that we were doing, those discussions were a part of the group and the work that I was doing at a tactical level. We decided that the best way to build that language is that I could bring him conversations related to new things and he could build on that with the perspective around finance and strategy. Before you knew it more natural conversations were enough that he could put my name forth for my next big role (LEADER 4).

Another participant stated,

It's hard when you're new in the organization, especially at a higher level, to start building those networks and know who those folks are so you have your voice heard behind closed doors, but I think those are barriers that I've encountered. I don't think these are barriers, especially the one I just shared, is one that's just specific to people of color or diversity candidates. I think it's just sometimes the organizational makeup and how that structure is. It is hard to network if you haven't been grown up within that environment (LEADER 6).

The effect inclusion guidance had was a great impact when this guidance existed.

Table 4 shows greater than eighty percent of women or 8 out of 10 who shared that committed mentoring influenced their promotion aspirations and eventual promotions.

Table 5 shows a similar effect that inclusion guidance had on the promotion aspiration of participants. Where advice was abundant, participant responses also revealed high engagement. The collective experiences of the participants showed that employee

assimilation and participation were outcomes of inclusion guidance. The perception of leadership support and even support from mentors was important factors in participant promotion aspiration perceptions.

Table 4

*Emerged Theme 3*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Committed Mentoring	Perception of leadership support	Organizational (43), perceptions (38), conversations (5), rapport (3)	80%
	Perception of mentor and support	Mentor (43), grow (16), wanted (15)	100%

Table 5

*Emerged Theme 4*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Inclusion Guidance	Career guidance	Career(s) (61), roles(s) (56), positions (45)	80%
	Feedback and coaching to build career preparation	Build (15), aspire (15), valued (15), fortunate (12), enhance (10)	100%

Participant responses demonstrated the role a commitment mentor and guidance toward more inclusion played on the promotion aspirations. The perception of leadership

support for career guidance and feedback was instrumental in promotion advancement for the above seventy percent of the participants.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question, “What were participant perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions”? Beyond understanding whether promotions aspirations of African American women are affected by these inclusion strategies, the participants also provided responses that indicated their perceptions of these strategies. The value placed on the inclusion strategy by the participant revealed the positive or negative impact on their perceptions.

**Theme 5: Social inclusion.** Affinity and employee resource groups can provide an association to support the social inclusion and participation of ethnically or gender diverse employees. These findings are consistent with the literature on employee resource groups (Welbourne & McLaughlin, 2013). Welbourne and McLaughlin (2013) found that social-cause-centered employee resource groups create a sense of belonging to something bigger than self. While not highly emphasized as an inclusion strategy that impacted their perceptions, it was mentioned by 9 out of the 10 participants as a strategy provided by their organization. Additionally, participants said other questioned inclusion strategies such as inclusion in leader-employee social events, or any other inclusion building activities. One participant shared,

If you're looking out at your leadership and you don't see any women, you don't see any women of color, and your succession planning is telling the same story,



then the organization has to be real and make changes. For those folks that are diversity candidates, it's very difficult if you don't see other folks that are like you sitting in higher seats because you wonder if you're going to ever have that opportunity. A lot of organizations are not like this, it's just making sure they've got the right representation and the right programs in place to build up the talent to get to that representation (LEADER 6).

Another participant stated,

The networking in terms of the rapport-building on a social level, I think that's helped me network outside of the company. But in terms of inside the company, it's being looked upon as a person with new ideas or with ideas that haven't been tried yet (LEADER 9).

Another participant noted,

I think that's where we fall short as women, and as black women, because we don't have the networking competency, and males, white males, black males, you guys will always circle and share. Even if you're talking about basketball, you're going to share ideas. Women? No. Not so much (LEADER 10).

As participants shared their collective experiences, they highlighted their perceptions regarding inclusion in leader-employee social events, organizational affinity groups, or any other inclusion building activities strategies. Another participant noted,

“They had different programs within the company - Asian/American Network, Women’s Network. If there was something that you wanted to be a part of you could be included” (LEADER 2).

Finally, another participant noted,

Women's Unlimited was very direct. It specifically talked about what the obstacles are and the rules of the game. How do you play the game if you don't know what the rules are? The goal of the Program is to educate women on how things get done, how decisions are made, and how you need to carry yourself in the organization to assure that you not only get to the table but when you get to the table you eat. I have been impressed by the program and remain a part of it (LEADER 5).

One participant stated,

It's a very male-oriented company where I am, and even things like lunch, no one invites me to lunch. They go to lunch together, teams will go to lunch together all the time. They go hunting, they golf, all these things they do together, and the only person that ever made an effort for me to do anything socially was because he wanted me to hang out with his wife because his life didn't like it here, and he wanted to get promoted before he leaves. He was just planning to be here a few more years, and he figured that if she had a friend, that she wouldn't want to leave. He encouraged her to call me, call me, call me and do stuff with me. When I was at the house when he came in with one of our other peers and said oh hey, how are you two girls doing? (LEADER 8).

Social inclusion through the variety of inclusion strategies played an essential role in facilitating the assimilation of the African American women into the workplace and affecting their perceptions of these inclusion strategies. Table 6 reveals that one hundred

percent of the participants found value for their promotion aspiration in having strong social inclusion in the workplace. Through social inclusion strategies, participants revealed networks and events which influenced their perceptions of organizational inclusion strategies.

Table 6

*Emerged Theme 5*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Social Inclusion	Social engagement	People (107), groups (34), affinity (23), social (19), network (18)	100%

Social engagement was recognized by all ten participants as critical to feeling included. Employee resource groups and invitation to other leader-led social events was acknowledged to have had a positive effect on participant promotion aspirations.

#### **Research Question 4**

The fourth research question was, “What were participant perceptions of whether organizational inclusion strategies such as leader sponsorship, mentoring, leader-employee social events, organization sponsored affinity groups, and other diversity and inclusion building actions enhanced their aspiration for promotion?” Beyond understanding the African American women perceptions of these strategies, understanding if these strategies enhanced promotion aspirations was also a goal of this

research. The participants described the effect various inclusion strategies had on their aspirations to seek promotion.

**Theme 6: Aspirational support.** With personal effort and investment in education obtained, organizational support with inclusion strategies proved to enhance participant preparation for success. Some of the participants were continuing to pursue additional higher education. In one case, the organization was financially supporting the attainment of the higher-level degree. Self-motivation and achievement were apparent in each of the participants as evidenced by their pursuit of higher education. This is undoubtedly an example of readiness for success which is suggested in the literature by (Stephen & Margie, 2012). Stephen and Margie (2012) found that as team leaders and manager displayed a commitment to increase succession readiness, the follower showed more interest in identifying development opportunities. While aspiring was evident for each participant, the research question seeks to understand if the questioned strategies enhance promotion aspirations. One participant noted,

Before moving into the manufacturing leadership position, my mentor that I had was fantastic. He was upfront and honest in saying, “if you want to move up in a plant, if you want to your career and get great experience, then you need to do team leader type positions – something where you are managing others. He said at the time, you are going to hate it when you do it but it is going to be a great experience and will learn a lot (LEADER 2).

LEADER 2 went further to state,

Being young, I was put over about 30 technicians most of who were older than me. It was a big learning curve. There were some that literally wanted to “tap” the system to see how far they could push. And then there were those that just wanted to help you succeed. The lack of knowledge was the biggest barrier. It was a tall order but it was also what I signed up for. The biggest take away is that every day is a learning (LEADER 2).

This participant response reveals the power and influence leader support can have in motivating and eventually enhancing the promotion aspirations.

Another participant stated,

For me it is the message of investing in my learning recognizing that I had a unique offer. That was very important to me - - It was clear to me that it was not a perception that I had a need. It was as much that I had an offer and therefore, the extra investment in the organization to pour into my learning and development. That was uplifting and energizing in and of itself. I would not have wanted the messaging to be any other way (LEADER 4).

Another participant shared,

At my current company, the company that recruited me, they were very focused on what I had achieved as a female and were very direct in the interview process. And they noted, we believe your potential was even greater than what you have already achieved. And we do not see any female executives in the company you are currently in. In this company, the CEO was a female at the time. They stated

that there is no ceiling and I could grow as much as I desired to grow. I took a lateral transfer to be a part of this company. I am now the Vice President of the company. They sent me to an Executive Leadership program at The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania (LEADER 5).

These two participants above reveal how the interactions and networks provided the opportunity for the African American women as they aspired for additional challenge and opportunity. One of the participants, who began as a manufacturing floor supervisor, has progressed to Vice President of Operations. The experiences also support the role mentors and networking can play in enhancing promotion aspirations. Another participant stated,

I've been supported by being able to further my growth and take leadership courses that allow me to understand what's trending for leaders today, understanding the business market, it allows me to further develop myself. From a personal standpoint, these organizations that offer coaching from a leadership standpoint, like formal coaching, like 360 Degree feedback, channels like that allow you just to get other's perspective so that way you can understand if you've got blind spots or there's areas that you need to improve on. I think having an environment ... making sure I picked the right environment where it was the right organization that really focused on people, people development because there are some companies out there that really don't focus on people development, so you don't have those opportunities to actually move yourself from a different point, from a different standpoint. I think, for me, it's just having an organization that

really focuses on that and allows you to have these courses and gives you the flexibility to look for things that you feel that you might need (LEADER 6).

Another participant shared,

In terms of inside the company, it's being looked upon as a person with new ideas or with ideas that haven't been tried yet. Also, that willingness to maybe try something and maybe fail the first time. Or I think it's the ability to have enough freedom to identify the idea, implement the idea, maybe fail at part of the idea, and then get it back up on its feet. That's been the thing that has moved the needle the most, more than the social events. I think for me it's self-driven because I want to see that needle move (LEADER 9).

The feeling of being in a safe environment to make mistakes while maintaining leadership sponsor support proved to be an enhancing inclusion strategy for the above two participants. While it can be easy to have aspirations and be self-motivated, the lived experiences reveal the positive influence aspirational support can have in promotion aspirations of these African American women manufacturing leaders. The adverse effect can be just as daunting as noted by the following participants,

I worked for Company A and it was so much who you know, rather than your abilities or your potential. It was who you know, you're related to, who ... It was type of environment. And it makes it very, very difficult to want to become the best at what you do, or hone your skills, and you get discouraged very quickly, immediately you're like, "Okay this is really not the place for me because I'm not going grow here (LEADER 7).

Another leader stated,

We have different business resource groups, i.e. Company X African American Network Group. I am on that as a co-lead person. With that group, we work very hard to make sure that we retain people that come in and try to guide them on the next path on where they want to be next. The deficiency will be that no one will ever ask – once you get in the door you just stay right there. They don't ask what do you see yourself doing or do you have other aspirations in your career here (LEADER 1).

Even as many of the participants lived experiences provided positive responses to the enhancing influence of questioned inclusion strategies, the above experiences show how inclusion strategies can inhibit promotion aspirations at a current company. The participant experiences reveal that African American women who have negative inclusion experiences may become demotivated to engage in the contemporary culture and begin to seek other professional growth opportunities. The participant responses reveal the self-motivated employee supported by inclusion strategies may remain aspirational for further growth. Table 7 shows that eighty percent of participants views aligned with the emerged theme and experienced greater aspiration when they felt support for aspiring.



Table 7

*Emerged Theme 6*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Aspirational Support	Involvement at work	Inclusion (107), included (32), engaged (26)	80%
	Influence	Feel (41), changed (26), initiative (10), aspiration (8), passion (6)	80%

When being recognized for engagement and taking initiative, eighty percent of participants felt they had support for their aspirations. The support changed their feelings about personal achievement and motivated them to aspire for even greater promotional opportunities.

**Research Question 5**

The fifth research question, "What were participant perceptions of organizational leadership development program aimed to prepare them for promotion opportunities?" This is one area where nine out of 10 participants provided more definite and specific experiences regarding leadership development and how it affected their promotion opportunities. For these women of color, the organizational effort toward inclusion strategies aligned with leadership development preparations revealed the powerful influence of these combined initiatives.

**Theme 7: Leadership development.** Leadership development was proven to have a positive effect on promotion opportunities for the research participants. Over half of the participants saw growth opportunities in their career with some moving up to executive positions. While each participant began in entry-level manufacturing supervisor positions, the organizational development programs significantly enhanced their promotion opportunities. Even for participants whose growth had stalled, (LEADERS 1 and 3) development programs were still made available. Previous research such as (Coloma, Gibson, & Packard, 2012) provides support for the benefits and a positive impact of leadership development programs. Coloma, Gibson, and Packard (2012) noted that many leadership development programs include elements to enhance learning and prepare for greater opportunities. A critical factor in the promotion preparation for each participant was the organization and discipline of the leadership development program. When leadership development programs were made available and an inclusion strategy was evident, the promotion opportunity became more realized by the participant. One participant stated,

Once a year we have “Front Line Leaders.” It’s a workshop that consists of a whole day where you learn different skills to help you in your job. It’s not necessarily for me. We have different things that we have to teach and get them to understand to get them to be better leaders. The whole point of the Front-Line Leaders is to set people up to succeed rather than fail (LEADER 1).

Another leader noted,

I was in a Rotational Program where I did rotations through operations and procurement. The purpose of that program was to dive into 3 different aspects of supply chain that were important for understanding the whole process of supply chain and getting placed in a role. Once I finished that year, I put in a preference to move into a manufacturing location to be a team leader. I put in a preference for the role and the location (LEADER 2).

Additionally, another leader shared,

Identifying me for one of the more prestigious programs at Company B that is the Experience Financial Leadership Program as well as the financial rewards that come with stock and engagement. Hired by the outgoing CEO of Company B when he was the business president to be his Director of Strategy was my first role there. I very quickly recognized as high potential talent and rewarded financially but then also identified for their senior leadership program of quite a honor and prestige called XLP. You are identified by the CEO of the company as 1 of the top 40 if you will. You go through a 9-month program where you work through a business problem and present it to the Board (LEADER 4)

These findings reveal the benefits for the participants of being involved in an organized development program that teaches critical business-related skills needed and used by every other prosperous demographic group. These participants benefited from opportunities afforded them and further displayed an aspiration for growth and development. The support received also was an encouragement to their aspirations.

Additionally, a participant shared,

I have been sent to a number of signature development programs. The last company I was with, sent me a nationally recognized program in the U.S. for the development of women in leadership. They also sent me to a well-respected university to a signature development program. I was also sent to a yearlong Leadership Institute. This was a great program. Only one participant from each company attends to create an environment where leaders can share strategies and challenges in the workplace from diversity-inclusion, mergers-acquisitions, strategy development, deployment, how to read a 10K (LEADER 5).

Once again, the participant shared experiences with the organizational leadership development initiative reveals the organizational effort to develop depth and breadth of the business skills and knowledge. The participants had a more impactful experience that affected their promotion opportunities when the leadership development was structured with defined outcomes. One hundred percent of the participants acknowledged the benefit gained for the preparation and promotion through organized leadership development initiatives (see Table 8). While several of the participants shared positive lived experiences and have seen significant promotion growth in their careers, other participant' growth has stalled in their current organizations.

Table 8

*Emerged Theme 7*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Axial Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>Percent of Participants who shared these views</b>
Leadership Development	Training and Development	Programs (63), development (51), skills (39), develop (14), training (18), learn (17)	100%

Effort to develop leadership skills can be positive and one-hundred percent of participants acknowledged the positive effect it had on the promotion aspirations. The more organized the initiative, the greater the impact for participants. The responses from participants and the consistent use of key terms and experiences provided insightful content to answer the research questions. The research questions explored the what and how concerning inclusion strategies effect on African American women promotion aspirations in manufacturing leadership positions. Lastly, responses reveal that each participant already possessed aspiration for personal growth and was either a beneficiary of organizational inclusion strategies or stymied by the lack of organizational commitment to inclusion strategies.

### **Summary**

The African American women who participated in this research study shared their experiences with organizational inclusion strategies. Their descriptions gave clarity to the role inclusion strategies had on their promotion aspirations. One of the most exciting events any employee will undertake is the preparation for promotion and seeing the fruit

of this effort. Traditionally, other ethnic and male demographic groups experience promotions into higher positions in manufacturing at a higher percentage rate than African American women. Until now, research has not focused on this demographic group, inclusion strategies, and the effect these strategies have on African American women promotion aspirations for manufacturing leadership positions. Previous research has focused on diversity and inclusion, gender differences, leadership development, promotions, manufacturing leadership, and aspirations, but have yet to research the combined effect on African American women.

The research data consisted of 10 African American women. The interviews with these women revealed seven primary themes that provided insight as to why these African American women experienced fewer promotions into manufacturing leadership positions than other demographic groups. The emerged themes created a clear picture of the lived experiences of inclusions effect on African American women promotion aspiration into manufacturing leadership positions. The data indicated that organizational commitment to inclusion strategies, combined with supporting mentor and sponsor relationships, aligned with structured leadership development for aspiring leaders, contributes to the increase in African American women promotion aspirations as well as promotions. While the organizational efforts can be honorable, African American women must also (a) accept the organizational inclusion strategies in partnership, (b) invest in self-development as the organization invest in them, (c) appreciate inclusion efforts but own your own career, and finally, (d) re-invest in being a mentor to others through employee resource or affinity groups. As professionals, African American research

participants who had experienced growth in their careers were most effective when the organizations provided support. In the context of their career and not as individual events, is where participants experienced a positive effect on organizational support.

As the participants shared their stories, their responses remained focused on inclusion events that affected their career. Not all participants had positive experiences. Two participants identified their careers as "stalled."

Leader 2 stated,

“As far as mentorship programs, there are not any mentorship programs currently. Personal development for this company is slim to none. I go outside of the organization and include myself with Black professionals and networking events. I go outside and am a part of plenty of groups that I can become diverse with different avenues.”

The second leader, Leader 1 shared,

They have always said there was some type of inclusion strategy but we never really saw it come to fruition. For instance, we just now have an African American woman that is in one of the higher leadership roles. It had never taken place up until this year. By 2020, they want 20% of the leadership team to be minority and that doesn't really take place. If you were to walk into our organization today, most that you will see in top leadership will be the white males and you will see a lot of white females. You will see hourly people that are African American but not in leadership roles.

Even though these two participants shared that their careers seem to have stalled, they continued to provide inclusion related experiences while avoiding topics such as

racism, sexism, or any other harmful aspects to blame for their lack of promotion. The combination of the participant stories formed a narrative that portrays inclusion strategies effect on the promotion aspirations of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions. Chapter 5 presents a detailed discussion of the research conclusions and recommendations.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and understand the significance of this study, provide possible explanations of the findings, present limitations of the study, and discuss recommendations for future research. Finally, the chapter includes a review of the positive social implications.

The research exploration revealed that inclusion strategies, when consistently supported by the organization, influence promotion aspirations of African American women in manufacturing leadership. The research also showed that strategies that create a long-standing and consistent alignment between senior and influential leaders and African American women significantly affect promotions and promotion aspiration among the research participants. Conversely, the research revealed the absence of reliable mentoring relationships resulted in lowered promotions aspirations. The African American women who experienced promotions and aspirations for greater opportunities gained momentum when partnered with strong mentors.

The lived experiences collected from the African American women participants showed how their motivation, engagement, and aspirations for inclusion and promotion were affected. As organizations seek avenues to build more inclusion into their leadership, the findings revealed that African American women value mentor relationships, leadership development opportunities, and learning business skills. Organizations build and implement inclusion strategies but often fail to assess their impact on any demographic group. Although not the focus of this research, the question

remains as to how organizations measure the success of such strategies. If the results of this research are an indication, assessment of such strategies could yield organizations some valuable insights. The findings from the interviews revealed that the promotion aspiration of African American women in manufacturing leadership experienced some level of positive impact because of organizational inclusion strategies.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Considering existing research, it is essential to revisit the theoretical framework that guided this study. Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory was used as the theoretical framework because it encapsulated the ideas of inclusion. Ahluwalia (2018) noted that those in power must promote core values that enhance their social identity as a way of reaffirming their acceptance of diversity. While many participants shared their desire to be included, they also discussed their intention to not compromise their personal or social identity. One participant stated, "you make decisions when you are younger about compromise and all those things and I get it. But right now, no. I'm in a position where I'm not going to do that." It was rewarding to hear the participant conviction to maintaining a self-driven social identity and how they had earned their positions through their efforts. Social identity as a theoretical framework embodied participant learning experiences.

In the following subsection, I interpret findings to each of the seven themes and their corresponding subthemes. It seems that many of the comments from participant interviews could fit into any one of the seven themes. The experiences and responses from participant interviews can often overlap into more than one theme.

### **Theme 1: Inclusion Strategy Commitment**

The theme of inclusion strategy commitment established the foundation upon which all the organization diversity and inclusion initiative hung. In this section, I will describe how existing literature from Chapter 2 compared with my findings concerning the theme inclusion strategy commitment. It is structured by organizing themes that led to the emerged theme of inclusion strategy commitment. The identifying themes that led to the emerged theme of inclusion strategy commitment are below.

**Corporate support to promote inclusion.** According to the participant responses, the feeling of support meant much to individuals who are often unrepresented or underrepresented. Srivastava and Tang (2015) found that employee performance was highly correlated with organizational commitment. Even as participants had prepared themselves through higher education achievement, they also acknowledged the effect of organization support on their promotion aspirations. One participant stated, "when I see a higher-up come on the floor, and engage with the workforce, talk to the new leaders, talk to the new supervisors, and just, I love it." As the organizational leadership committed to supporting actions for these African American women, the engagement and promotion aspiration was apparent. Aggerholm and Thomsen (2012) noted that workplace diversity is causing leaders to work extremely hard and use communication as a building block to employee unity and commitment. The idea of organizational support was found to be closely aligned with participants perspective.

**Perceptions of organizational support.** As discussed in chapter 2, a corporate strategy has been used to drive goal attainment and support for achieving organizational

goals (Valentine & Hollingworth, 2015). When follow-through and consistent support for the inclusion strategies were visible, the African American women perceptions were positive. One participant stated, "the CEO is part of, he's committed to inclusion and gender parity by 2030, and the CEO is really pushing this." Moin (2018) stated that a leader's behavior has a differing effect on employee perceptions of support. The participant responses suggested that these African American women's perceptions aligned with the organizational effort and commitment to the inclusion strategies. The higher the commitment, the higher the positive perceptions and vice versa.

**Strategic commitment to inclusion.** Several participants described how impactful the evidence of organizational commitment to communicated diversity and inclusion initiatives had on their promotion aspirations. Martínéz and Fineman (2010) found that many organizations know how to support diversity and inclusion initiatives but fail to recognize how to activate and benefit from them. As organizational strategy provides a guidepost for decision making to achieve desired outcomes, commitment to diversity and inclusion strategies also provide measurable benefits. One participant felt the organization had not lived up to their diversity and inclusion commitment. As a result, the individual discussed how she felt the need to look for other career opportunities outside the organization. This participant's experience was an exception and not the rule as far as the experience of other participants. Many of the participant experiences in this research revealed how effective commitment to inclusion strategies was upon their promotion aspirations. The research findings concluded that unrepresented and underrepresented employees do benefit when organizational strategic inclusion effort is

made for their benefit. The results of this research conclude that participants feeling of inclusion paved the way for other benefits within the workplace.

### **Theme 2: Supportive Leadership Alignment**

The theme of supportive leadership alignment gained significant support as participants discussed the feelings of being in alignment with other leaders. While it is possible for the participants to give personal effort to achieve career growth, study results proved that leader alignment was motivational. The identifying theme that led to the emerged theme of supportive leadership alignment is below.

**Support from leaders.** Tang (2018) argued that organizational commitment promotes a relationship between inclusion perception and performance. This was confirmed through my study. One participant stated that “at the plant manager's direction, that's when I started sitting in a lot more meeting with other directors, other vice presidents, and the president.” Lloyd, Boer, and Voelpel (2017) noted that feeling listened to by the leader fosters the perceptions of fair treatment and job satisfaction. Many of the participants acknowledged the effect of leadership alignment upon their desired goals and how it was instrumental in furthering their promotion aspirations.

### **Theme 3: Committed Mentoring**

Participants identified mentoring as the most impactful inclusion strategy upon their promotions aspiration. While many organizations utilize mentors to support employee development, it was the evidence of the mentor's commitment that was most impactful for the study participants. Allen, Eby, Chao, and Bauer (2017) noted that mentoring could be a process to facilitate the adjustment to a new organization or new

position. The identifying theme that led to the emerged theme of committed mentoring is below.

**Perceptions of mentor and support.** The perceptions of inclusion have been found to play an essential role in the employee's motivation for engagement and even achievement. Brimhall, Barak, Hurlburt, Palinkas, Henwood, and McArdle (2017) found that the prioritization and quality of the leader and employee interaction increase inclusion among the diverse workforce. Chen and Tang (2018) argued that organizational commitment promotes a relationship between inclusion perception and promotions. One participant noted concerning their mentor, "he helped guide me, shape ... you know, develop all those things. And just part of that, I was able to go through certain doors, just from him being my mentor." Another stated, "they were very attentive to growth and development. I was fortunate. I had a number of supporters." Participant responses suggested the role of mentoring relationships had an ever-increasing and positive effect on their promotion aspirations. Many also stated it affected their eventual promotion. In many cases, participants acknowledged the mentor and investment of time from the mentor was the motivating factor in seeking other opportunities. This research also found that the lack of feeling included was a motivating factor in two participants to explore additional outside opportunities or promotional opportunities in other areas of the organization.

#### **Theme 4: Inclusion Guidance**

Previous research suggests a lack of guidance is given to employees not in the workplace majority (Katz & Miller, 2016). Underrepresented and unrepresented

employee efforts to gain access was often limited by (a) a lack of awareness of the path for career growth and (b) someone to provide the guidance. The identifying theme that led to the emerged theme of inclusion guidance is below.

**Career Guidance.** A common perception from previous literature acknowledged the critical role leadership plays in influencing promotion decisions. Noon (2012) noted that hiring and selection challenged leaders to make no-discriminate choices to ensure the most qualified person is selected. One participant stated, "I had people around me that cared about my career and were willing to commit time to me as a mentor in that type of capacity." Many participants believed that leaders had been given the ability to influence hiring and promotion decisions. They also felt that the leaders influence impacted their motivation for promotion aspiration. When the leader has worked with, mentored, and witnessed another employee's drive and determination, the leader can advocate for the employee (Kosteas, 2011). Participant response in this study shows the role inclusion strategies had on promotion aspirations and the role the leader played in the participant's career progression.

### **Theme 5: Social Inclusion**

Being in the mainstream and a beneficiary of the social fabric of the organization was a goal of each research participant. Boekhorst (2015) defined *belongingness* as having a sense of organizational acceptance and *uniqueness* as having a sense of being a valued contributor. Participants acknowledged a desire to engage and contribute to the organization success. Previous research found that most employees want to be valued as

part of the dominant workplace culture (Löhdorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). The identifying theme that led to the emerged theme of social inclusion is below.

**Social engagement.** Organizations have established employee resource groups (ERG's) or affinity groups as an inclusion strategy to build workplace networks for diverse employees. Welbourne, Rolf, and Schlachter (2017) noted that ERG's enhance employee identification in the workplace. Welbourne et al. (2017) further stated that ERG's that fit within the organization's vision and mission also support participant identification. Every employee found some positive benefit from having access to and participation with an employee resource group. One participant stated, "a lot of my foundation was from joining those groups and taking apart and seeing what other options are out there because there are things that are not readily available to you and they don't tell you." Another participant stated that seeing other people like you succeeding is motivating". The research findings align with research that employee resource groups and affinity group are instrumental in promotion aspirations.

#### **Theme 6: Aspirational Support**

Even though all the research participants were in the minority in their workplaces, they all expressed a desire to grow their careers. Previous research found that African American women in the workplace lack internal connections, sponsors, mentors and many other benefits afforded other demographic groups (Rutledge, 2007). The identifying themes that led to the emerged theme of aspirational support are below.

**Involvement at work.** Previous research suggests the leader plays a significant role in the employee desiring to be involved and engaged in the workplace (Shuck &



Herd, 2012). Every research participant came into the workplace motivated to be involved and engaged. This research found that participant aspiration for promotion and to be more engaged in the workplace was affected by their perception of support. One participant stated that "I was fortunate to be around someone who was so adamant that you had to make those decisions as a leader so that you would have a pool of people to grow and develop within your company so that you would have diversity in your company down the road." The research confirmed that when the participant felt support for their aspirations, they displayed more motivation to be involved in the workplace.

**Influence.** Many of the participants discussed the feeling that their effort to be involved was being reciprocated. Xenikou (2014) states that charismatic leaders can inspire and motivate employees to believe they are supported and aligned with the organizational vision. One participant said that "the mentor program was one of the more helpful things that inspired me. My mentor was very good about putting himself in my shoes, understanding my frustrations/concerns." When the participants felt their effort to be involved was being noticed, they shared how it influenced their aspirations for more professional growth. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) noted that women of color have had to overcome barriers, stereotype, and sometimes oppressive systems to achieve career advancement. The findings of this research support previous research that aspirational support for the participants does affect promotion aspiration.

### **Theme 7: Leadership Development**

Leadership development research proposes that it alters and changes the landscape of organizations (Cummings et al., 2013). An advantage was found for

participants whose workplace provided very formal and organized leadership development training. The identifying theme that led to the emerged theme of leadership development is below.

**Training and development.** Carroll and Jones (n.d.) noted that leadership development helped an employee to know who they were in an organization. Participants involved in formal training and development initiatives offered significant evidence on the value it provided for their promotion aspirations. One participant shared, “it was clear to me that it was not a perception that I had a need. It was as much that I had an offer and therefore, the extra investment in the organization to pour into my learning and development. That was uplifting and energizing in and of itself.” A participant who had a great start to their career stated, “once a year we have “Front Line Leaders.” It’s a workshop that consists of a whole day where you learn different skills to help you in your job.” All participants touched upon the role training and development had on their promotion aspirations and career advancement.

The data in this study showed that the increased organizational effort to establish inclusion strategies for increased promotion aspiration. The research further displayed the subsequent career progression for these African American women in manufacturing leadership. Findings in Chapter 4 suggest that African American women in manufacturing do aspire for promotions and will seek these opportunities when a consistent effort is made by the organization to acknowledge their interest. Additionally, where commitment to organization inclusion strategies was apparent, findings in this research support the positive impact upon participants. Participants further acknowledged

the effect of many organizational inclusion initiatives. When mentoring relationships and leadership development were strategic initiatives, participants also affirmed positive perspectives.

Whereas previous literature found that African American women had shown slow progress in progressing higher in manufacturing leadership positions, this study provided evidence for organizations to understand better and more effective strategies for impacting leadership diversity. Although African American women in manufacturing leadership positions have increased, they continue to remain underrepresented in more senior manufacturing leadership positions. In an environment such as manufacturing where research reveals the lower percentage of African American women in leadership, the role of strategic leadership becomes even more critical. Gupta (2017) noted that leadership for a changing and more progressive manufacturing environment also requires greater management skills of leaders, empathy for people and love for technological engineering workplace. The participant responses from their lived experiences revealed that organizational inclusion strategies did affect African American women's' promotion aspirations. The collective participant responses also gave insight to some strategies such as mentoring that had a more significant impact than other strategies.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This phenomenological research study resulted in four limitations. The first limitation was the snowball sampling process used to select participants. Even though Chicago is a major metropolitan city with a large manufacturing base and LinkedIn is a vast social media network, the search for participants through only the LinkedIn social

media website limited access to the greater population. Finding participants on LinkedIn with a photograph and with position titles such as plant manager, plant supervisor, production supervisor, foreman, operation manager, general manager, or other similar titles limited search options. The second limitation applied to the data collection process. Considering the busy schedule of the participants and trying to get them scheduled to commit to a maximum 1-hour interview was challenging. After completing each interview, the transcribed interview was sent back to the participant to validate and verify the accuracy of the interview responses. While this process was made known to the participant and was all completed electronically, the time commitment to review the document became an extra request upon the participant. A third limitation is the ability to generalize the findings. The sample size of 10 participants from one large metropolitan city could leave questions about how reflective the results to other parts of the country or even other industries are. The final limitation was the viability of the data and could the participants accurately recall events from the past. Future studies may broaden the sample size to include other industries to counter some of these limitations.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Currently, the research literature has failed to consider the role and promotion of African American women in manufacturing leadership positions. Therefore, this study used a phenomenological design of 10 African American women to explore their experiences about the effect of inclusion strategies on their promotion aspirations. Based on the findings of this current study, three areas could benefit from further research to better understand how inclusion strategies affect the promotion aspirations of African

American women in manufacturing leadership. One area for further research would be to understand better the networking awareness of African American women and their ability to engage in new environments. Understanding the social strength of African American women may provide evidence regarding the ability to accept the invitation to be included. Does a high social ability enable stronger networking ties and cultural assimilation? Future research can seek to understand this dynamic for African American women in leadership positions.

The results of this study demonstrated the need for understanding promotion aspirations at different times during the individual's career trajectory. Understanding promotion aspirations at entry-level positions may differ for individuals after establishing a "foot in the door" path to higher opportunities has been found. Do the African American women remain motivated and persistent beyond the first rejection and what role does inclusion play? Further research to understand motivation level in the early career years versus later years would provide inclusion strategies effect or participant motivation factors. The results also revealed that each participant had experienced some degree of promotion in their career. Future researchers may seek to understand the impact of inclusions strategies at entry levels of the career versus higher levels of success.

A final area for further research would be to understand the effect of structured mentor programs and their promotion impact on other demographic groups. This research found that eight out of 10 participants discussed mentor relationships from a more formal perspective. Two of the participants did not have formal mentors but spoke of conversations with other leaders. The finding from this current research revealed the

positive effects for participants who participated in a formal mentor relationship.

Conversely, African American women who did not have a structured mentor relationship saw their career promotions stall. Further research to understand mentor programs, the educational and knowledge building intention of the program, and the receptivity of the mentee can provide understanding into its impact on promotions.

### **Implication for Social Change**

The current study provides for both the African American women in manufacturing leadership and organizational strategy developers evidence unknown before this research. This study offers the opportunity to see the impact on African American women who shared their experiences that had with inclusion strategies in the workplace. Additionally, participants shared the influence of the strategies on their promotion aspirations. These shared experiences show the positive impact organizations and African American women gained because of these initiatives. If organizations would fully support communicated inclusion strategies, assess strategies for effectiveness, and build networking relationship for African American women, they would positively impact the percentage of African American women in manufacturing leadership.

As evidenced by research in Chapter 2, few African American women have ascended to the higher levels of manufacturing and operation leadership. When organizations provide mentors, who commit to the enhancement and development of the African American women, the research has revealed how progressive careers can become. As African American women progress, they can then become mentors and role models for other employees who may feel excluded because of their gender or ethnicity.

As employees see role models and successful examples of people with their gender or ethnicity, they may also aspire to higher engagement and promotions.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the preceding discussion of this study's findings, five key conclusions were drawn. First, organizations can positively affect the diversity in their leadership population to include African American women when they employ and apply inclusion strategies. Second, researchers can begin to understand the effect inclusion strategies have on the promotion aspirations of African American women in manufacturing leadership, more specifically by investigating the role of mentors, affinity groups, employee resources groups, and other inclusion building and social event. Third, the study revealed the role inclusion strategies play on the perceptions of African American women in the workplace and how they see their career proregression through the eyes of organizational initiatives. Fourth, the findings provide a researcher with concrete actions that enhance participant aspirations for engagement and promotion in the workplace. The study revealed that when participants have self-motivation for success, organizational inclusion strategies improve this motivation. After being invited to participate in new opportunities, meetings, and events, participants' shared experiences provide evidence of more engaged and confident women. Participant shared experiences also reveal an appreciation for the inclusion strategic effort and leadership support. Organization inclusion strategic effort significantly affected the engagement and career interest of African American women.

Lastly, the findings suggested that organizations need to act now to implement and fully support inclusion strategies to benefit from diverse leadership teams. Without fully supporting inclusion strategies, organization leadership demographic teams will experience very little change in their team diversity. The actions taken can bear the fruit later for organizational diversity initiatives. As organization leadership teams grow in their diversity, they can also grow in the diversity of ideas and thoughts. As found by the enhancement of mentoring to educate on business knowledge, research participants reveal that diverse views can also be aligned with business strategies and initiatives. The findings from this study suggested inclusion strategies increase organizational credibility among the participants and thus enhances their aspiration for greater development and career promotion.



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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### Introduction

- Welcome participant and introduce myself.
- Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of interview.
- Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.
- Outline general ground rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for the interviewer to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Review break schedule and where the restrooms are located.
- Address the assurance of confidentiality.
- Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

### Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of African American women and organizational inclusion strategies that affect their aspiration for promotion. Specifically, the study will seek to understand what African American women perceive as factors that limit them from being better prepared to receive strong consideration for manufacturing leadership positions.

### Discussion Guidelines

Interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you don't understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you

might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

### **General Instructions**

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and other parties' names. Your identity will be kept confidential and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been a formal leader in manufacturing and what roles did you have prior to your current position?
2. Tell me about a time when the organization's inclusion strategy positively changed your perception of the organization.
3. Tell me about a time when the organization's inclusion strategy negatively changed your perception of the organization.
4. Since being employed by this organization, how has the organizational inclusion strategies made you as an African American woman feel included and valued for your leadership skills?
5. Tell me about any barriers you encountered when attempting to move into a manufacturing leadership position?
6. What efforts have been provided by the organization to improve your leadership skills and enhance your leadership reputation among your peers?

7. Have you had a leader sponsor, mentor, been included in leader-employee social events, organizational affinity groups, or other inclusion building activities? If so, which initiative had the most impact on your perception of inclusion and why?
8. Tell me about any organizational inclusion strategy that has increased your desire to become more engaged in the workplace success and what did you do differently to become engaged?
9. Tell me about your experience with a leader sponsor, mentor, inclusion in leader-employee social events, organizational affinity groups, or any other inclusion building activities and how any of these initiatives increased your aspiration for promotion opportunities?
10. How has any of the organizational inclusion strategies benefited your development and preparation for promotion into leadership positions or absorbing greater responsibilities?
11. Tell me about any organizational initiated leader development program and how the program inspired you toward seeking other leadership positions.
12. Tell me about any organizational leadership development effort and how the effort negatively or positively affected your perception of the organization.
13. Tell me about any organizational inclusion strategy that has inspired and encouraged you to aspire for greater involvement in leadership?
14. What actions could your organization take to inspire you to desire further growth in your professional career?

Conclusion

Discuss the member check process with participant, answer any questions, and thank the participant for her time.

## Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

**Name of Signer:**

During my activity in collecting data for this research titled “Inclusion Strategies Effect on the Promotion Aspirations of African American Women” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

**Signature:****Date:**



## Appendix C: Theme Identification Word Cloud Map



## Appendix D: Word Count Excel Spreadsheet

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
leadership	10	110	1.13
people	6	108	1.11
inclusion	9	107	1.10
organization	12	107	1.10
think	5	83	0.85
company	7	76	0.78
leader	6	65	0.67
program	7	63	0.65
manufacturing	13	56	0.57
career	6	55	0.56
right	5	52	0.53
development	11	51	0.52
position	8	45	0.46
strategy	8	44	0.45
mentor	6	43	0.44
organizational	14	43	0.44
African	7	40	0.41
going	5	39	0.40

skills	6	39	0.40
perception	10	38	0.39
strategies	10	35	0.36
groups	6	34	0.35
included	8	32	0.33
person	6	32	0.33
women	5	32	0.33
different	9	31	0.32
manager	7	31	0.32
someone	7	30	0.31
programs	8	29	0.30
roles	5	28	0.29
woman	5	27	0.28
changed	7	26	0.27
diversity	9	26	0.27
engaged	7	26	0.27
point	5	26	0.27
leaders	7	25	0.26
years	5	25	0.26
affinity	8	23	0.24
environment	11	23	0.24

positions	9	23	0.24
research	8	23	0.24
business	8	22	0.23
great	5	22	0.23
group	5	22	0.23
worked	6	22	0.23